NATION

SC halts Delhi govt's CAG audit of private discoms

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WhatsApp usernames are a cybercrime risk: Govt

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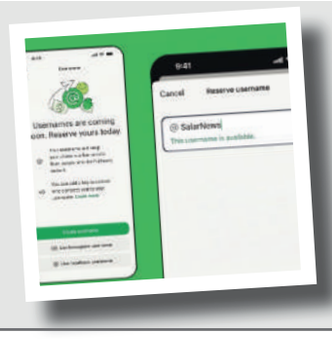

SPORTS

David vs Goliath: Messi's Arg meets Cape Verde in Round of 32

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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State hikes bus workers' pay by 12.5%

BENGALURU, 3 JULY

The State government has hiked the basic wage for employees across all four of Karnataka' transport corporations by 12.5 per cent starting this month, and applicable retrospectively from April 2025, according to a release. This comes as the government is considering hiking the fares amid rising fuel costs. *—SALAR NEWS*

Hantavirus outbreak is over, declares WHO

GENEVA, 3 JULY

The World Health Organisation (WHO) declared that the hantavirus outbreak linked to a cruise ship earlier this year was over after the last identified contact of an exposed person completed quarantine and tested negative for the virus. The outbreak on the MV Hondius infected 13 people and killed three. It involved the Andes virus, a rare hantavirus strain that typically circulates in Argentina and Chile.

"Although the outbreak is over, WHO will continue working with governments and partners to advance our understanding of this outbreak and of hantavirus more generally," WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said after the 42-day quarantine period for hantavirus exposure ended with the last identified contact. *—AGENCIES*

Frisking mandatory in Ram Temple after scam

AYODHYA, 3 JULY

The Shri Ram Janmbhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust has tightened security at the Ram Temple's donation counting centre following allegations of theft and embezzlement. Under the new protocol, counting staff must wear sky-blue pocketless gowns with neck zips while inside the counting room. Employees are required to change into the uniform before entering the secure area and remove it on leaving. Personnel now undergo multiple frisking checks before entering the facility, before accessing the counting room and after washroom breaks. Donations from about 35 collection boxes are counted daily. *—Agencies*

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Iran prepares for Khamenei's funeral

TEHRAN, 3 JULY

Iran is preparing for a days-long funeral for supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, with millions expected to gather in Tehran from Saturday following his death in the US-Israel war. His flag-draped coffin has been placed at Tehran's Grand Mosalla alongside family members killed in the opening Israeli strike. Senior officials, foreign dignitaries, including PDP leader Mehabooba Mufti, Congress leader Salman Kurshid, Bihar Governor Lieutenant General Syed Ata Hasnain, and Minister Pabitra Margherita from India are expected to attend the ceremonies. Authorities have decorated the capital with banners reading. *—PTI*

>>>More on Pages 5, 6

Govt bans 3 Chinese apps used to stop e-rickshaws

Bluetooth app was able to hack e-batteries

NEW DELHI, 3 JULY

The government has ordered the removal of three Chinese mobile applications - BAT-BMS, Lossigy and Epoch-i-ion - from app stores after they were allegedly misused to remotely disable battery-operated vehicles in India, official sources said on Friday.

The action follows the emergence of multiple videos on social media showing electric rickshaws being rendered inoperable through a remote shutdown feature linked to the BAT-BMS application. The videos triggered concerns over the ability of third-party applications to remotely access and control critical vehicle functions, raising questions about the cybersecurity safeguards built into battery management systems.

BAT-BMS is a Bluetooth-enabled battery management application developed by China's Shenzhen Grenergy Technology Co. Ltd. for monitoring and managing compatible lithium battery packs. The app itself is marketed as a battery monitoring and management utility rather than a vehicle control application. It allows users to view battery parameters such as charge level, voltage, current and temperature, and to control charging and discharge functions on compatible batteries. BAT-BMS works within a Bluetooth range of roughly 15 metres and can connect to multiple batteries simultaneously.

● Two people on a bike played a 'prank' on an e-rickshaw driver by stopping the vehicle with an app on their, drawing the government's attention

However, the Centre was concerned on the lack of authentication in some Bluetooth-enabled battery management systems used in low-cost e-rickshaws. Sources said the three applications were found to be misused to remotely disable battery-operated vehicles and have been ordered to be removed from app stores. *— PTI*

Instagram in soup again over ads on child sexual abuse

NEW DELHI, 3 JULY

IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw has directed officials in his Ministry to summon Meta over Instagram ads promoting child sexual abuse material, sources said on Friday.

The IT Ministry will seek an explanation from Meta on the issue, they added.

The move follows a BBC investigation that alleged Meta's recommendation algorithm had been promoting videos containing child sexual abuse material (CSAM), exposing serious gaps in its safeguards.

The BBC report said that Instagram has been running paid advertisements promoting child sexual abuse material in India, with terms like "rape video" and "child video." They also include links to Telegram channels on which the material can be bought for prices as low as Rs 99.

Meta told the BBC it had already disabled several such advertisements and suspended the accounts posting them, and that it had blocked further URLs, suspended even more accounts and removed more ads based on the BBC's report. Telegram said it had disabled more than 2,74,000 groups and channels related to child sexual abuse material in 2026. *—Salar News*

Opposition leaders have been posting videos of voters in mosques and community halls allegedly filling out SIR enumeration forms and sought the ECI's attention, prompting the CEO's response *—SCREENGRAB*

Amid backlash, CEO tells K'taka BLOs to go to houses for SIR

BENGALURU, 3 JULY

Karnataka CEO V Anbukkumar on Friday directed Booth Level Officers to visit houses and distribute enumeration forms for the SIR as per the EC's guidelines after complaints from parties such as the JD(S) alleged that the BLOs were handing out the forms from mosques and other locations.

"As per the directions, guidelines and schedule issued by the Election Commission of India, distribution of enumeration forms to voters began in Karnataka on 30 June. However, some complaints have been received alleging that BLOs are not visiting houses and are distributing the forms from offices," Anbukkumar said in a letter to all district election officers.

"You are hereby instructed to... strictly adhere to the ECI's directions and guidelines."

He said that voters who find it difficult to fill out the enumeration forms have the option of visiting Voter Facilitation Centres for assistance, and that this facility should be publicised.

The house-to-house enumeration phase of the SIR, which commenced on 30 June, will continue till 29 July.

JD(S) leader and Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy on Thursday alleged massive irregularities in the SIR exercise and posted videos of exercises being conducted at a community hall in Ramanagara and in Kunigal, an apparent violation of the ECI's directions. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

Ex-DMK Neta held for remarks on Vijay, Trisha

Former Tamil Nadu Minister Anitha Radhakrishnan was arrested in a defamation case for remarks on CM Vijay and actress Trisha *—ANI*

TUTICORIN, 3 JULY

Former Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) Minister Anitha R Radhakrishnan was arrested here on Friday following the Madras High Court rejecting his anticipatory bail plea relating to his defamatory speech against Chief Minister C Joseph Vijay, police said.

The complaint pertains to remarks in which Radhakrishnan on 20 June mocked Vijay's appearance and his transition from the film industry to politics. He also questioned Vijay's relationship with actress Trisha.

Justice GK Ilanthiraiyan while dismissing Radhakrishnan's anticipatory bail petition, observed that he ought not to have made such statements as a sitting legislator.

"Since 1967, people from the cinema are being elected. Then why are you making these statements?" the court remarked.

DMK president MK Stalin questioned the urgent need to arrest Radhakrishnan.

If arrests were made in defamation cases, then how many ministers would be arrested for their speeches, he asked. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

DKS mulls increasing coal power amid El Nino induced rain deficit

BENGALURU, 3 JULY

Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Friday directed the Energy Department to prepare a special emergency action plan to safeguard Karnataka's power sector against a possible decline in hydropower generation due to El Nino and the lack of rainfall.

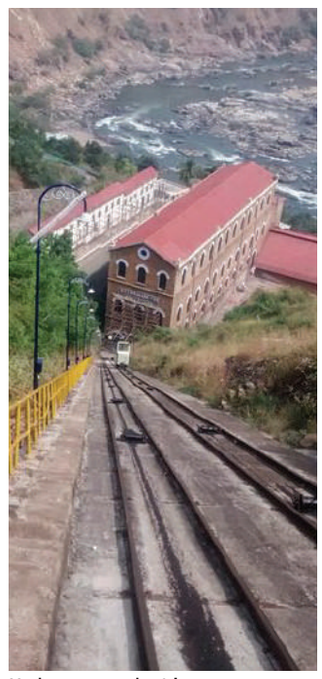
At his first review meeting with the department, he asked officials to prioritise power storage, alternative generation sources, operationalise state-allocated coal mines and maintain adequate coal reserves to tackle a potential drought. Officials informed him that Karnataka's power reserves are better than last year and that the State has avoided power cuts over the past three years.

"We are the IT capital, and we are working towards making our state the capital of Artificial Intelligence as well. Therefore, we must prepare now for the growing electricity demand driven by data centres, AI infrastructure and the digital economy," Shivakumar said, directing officials to expedite Battery Energy Storage Systems and Pumped Storage Projects.

Energy Minister KJ George said the Gruha Jyothi scheme had not imposed any additional financial burden, but sought early payment or securitisation of Rs 12,631 crore owed by government departments to ESCOMs.

Shivakumar also directed officials to accelerate feeder solarisation, energy-efficient pump sets, Demand Side Management programmes, smart meter installation, power grid upgrades, renewable energy integration, electric vehicle charging infrastructure and transmission projects. With peak demand expected to touch 38 GW by 2035, he asked the department to prepare a financing roadmap and secure central assistance. *—PTI*

>>>Drought on Page 2



Hydroenergy plant in Shivanasamudra *—X @LKATHEEQ*

Centre allows 4 Chinese power firms to seek tenders

NEW DELHI, 3 JULY

India has permitted four Chinese power equipment manufacturers with factories in the country to participate in government tenders for critical power projects, according to a government order. TBEA Energy, Nanjing Electric India, New Northeast Electric India, and Taikai Electric (India) are allowed to bid, as per the Ministry of Finance's order dated 24 June.

The power ministry sought this exemption in January for entities with manufacturing units involved in vital projects.

The order, valid for two years, states this should not set a precedent for others. The move signals a thawing of India's stance on Chinese investments, after restrictions since a 2020 border clash.

It also comes amid India's efforts to expand its transmission network to meet rising energy demand and renewable targets. *—Agencies*

MP HC judge receives threats after ruling on mob lynching

BHOPAL, 3 JULY

The Madhya Pradesh High Court has directed protection for Additional District and Sessions Judge Tabassum Khan of Narmadapuram district, following threats after her conviction in a 2022 mob lynching case. On 12 June, Judge Khan sentenced 14 accused to life imprisonment for the lynching of a man suspected of cow smuggling. Since the verdict, she has faced constant threats.

A division bench of Justices Vivek Agarwal and Avanindra Kumar Singh, while hearing a suo motu petition on judicial officer security, noted that one officer had been subjected to ongoing threats.

The court called the matter "serious".

The bench also directed that Judge Khan be provided protection.

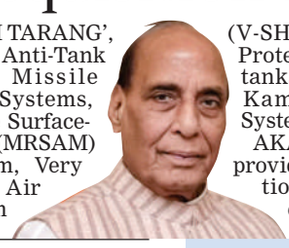
An FIR has already been registered, with the next hearing scheduled for 9 July. *—ANI*

DAC approves Rs 52,000 cr acquisition for Defence Forces

NEW DELHI, 3 JULY

The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, has given Acceptance of Necessity (AoN), in-principle approval for acquisition proposals worth approximately Rs 52,000 crore to bolster the Indian Defence Forces' combat readiness.

A Defence Ministry press release stated that for the Indian Army, approvals include procurement of Anti-Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) Electronic Warfare System 'AKASH TARANG', Man Portable Anti-Tank Guided Missile (MPATGM) Systems, Medium Range Surface-to-Air Missile (MRSAM) Weapon System, Very Short Range Air Defence System (V-SHORADS), Active Protection System for tanks, and Jet-Based Kamikaze Drone System.



AKASH TARANG will provide anti-UAV protection; MPATGM will counter mechanised threats; MRSAM offers medium-range air defence; V-SHORADS enhances counter-measure resilience; the Active Protection System improves tank survivability; and Kamikaze Drones offer enhanced electronic warfare capabilities. *—ANI*

BLUE FLAG BEACHES

Karnataka eyes cruise, beach tourism push under Coastal-Malnad policy

BENGALURU, 3 JULY

Karnataka is drafting a comprehensive Coastal-Malnad Karnataka Tourism Policy 2026 to unlock the region's tourism potential, Tourism Minister KJ George said the government is preparing a policy focused on cruise, beach and adventure tourism across six coastal and Malnad districts.

The proposed framework aims to develop theme-based tourism circuits, attract international cruise liners to Mangaluru and other ports, improve beach infrastructure, promote Blue Flag beaches, water sports and community-led tourism.

George directed officials to consult cruise operators, strengthen cleanliness and safety standards, create curated visitor experiences and generate sustainable livelihoods for local communities. The policy also seeks to enhance visitor infrastructure, encourage private investment, boost employment, and position Karnataka. *—PTI*

2-year-old boy drowns in Pune trench

PUNE, 3 JULY

A two-year-old boy died after falling into a nearly three-foot-deep trench filled with rainwater and sewage in Maharashtra's Pune district, following which police booked the contractor, officials said on Friday.

The incident occurred on 30 June at Kadamwak Wasti in the Loni gram panchayat area, they said.

The trench had been dug alongside a drain to facilitate the flow of rainwater, police said. Rainwater and sewage had accumulated in it. The toddler, who lived in a nearby settlement, accidentally fell into it while playing, said officials.

The child's parents began searching for him after realising that he had been missing for a long time. Subsequently, his body was recovered from the trench.

A case has been registered against the contractor for alleged negligence. *—PTI*

Farmers protest seeking drought relief

Mysuru & Mandya ryots say Centre, State were too slow in declaring drought, giving aid

MYSURU, 3 JULY

Various farmer unions protested in front of the Mahatma Gandhi statue at Gandhi Square in Mysuru on Friday to press both the State and Central government to start declaring taluks and districts hit by a massive dry spell as drought-hit and begin releasing compensation. Similar protests were held in Mandya as well.

The protest was spearheaded by Members of Karnataka State Farmers Federation, Karnataka State Sugarcane Growers Association and comes a day after Chief Minister DK Shivakumar urged farmers to "rethink before sowing" amid a massive rainfall deficit.

The protesters, however, alleged that the State and Central governments were too slow in declaring regions as drought hit. They shouted slogans and noted that people are struggling to arrange fodder, drinking water and that standing crops were withering in various parts of State, including Mysuru and Chamarajanagar districts. They called upon the government to take action. Addressing the protesters, Karnataka Sugarcane Growers Association President Kuruburu Shanthakumar said that both the governments must bail out farmers from the crisis and set aside their political differences.

- The protest comes a day after Chief Minister DK Shivakumar urged farmers to "rethink before sowing" amid a massive rainfall deficit.

The protesters demanded that the governments immediately conduct a scientific survey of crop loss, extend relief measure and release crop insurance cover. They also called for the recovery dates of loans be postponed this year, and that the interest for crop loans be waived.

Shantakumar also condemned the State government for its decision to begin acquiring 7,500 acres of "fertile agricultural land" for the proposed Bidadi Township project, even though it was against the interests of farmers. He said it would result in the destruction of coconut, arecanut plantations, and condemned both the Congress and Opposition parties for "politicising" the issue.

Farmer leaders Attahalli Devaraj, Baradanapura Nagaraj, among others were present during the protest.

Meanwhile, in Mandya members of the State Farmers Association (Unification) blocked traffic and demanded that water from the KRS dam be released into canals as farmers were not able to grow crops. *—Salar News*

Belagavi forests are off limits amid heavy rains

BELAGAVI, 3 JULY

Forest Department banned public entry to forest areas and waterfalls under the Belagavi Forest Division in view of heavy rainfall in the Western Ghats.

Forest personnel have been deployed at vulnerable points across the forest to ensure public safety and prevent entry.

Meanwhile, a landslide occurred along the National Highway in Honnavar town of Uttara Kannada district following incessant rainfall over the past two days. No vehicles were passing at the time, and no one was injured.

Residents, however, alleged that the incident was not caused by heavy rain alone. They claim that unscientific hill cutting carried out during the highway widening project had weakened the slope, making it vulnerable to landslides during the monsoon season. *—Salar News*

Pramodadevi opposes Ashada darshan ticket

MYSURU, 3 JULY

Member of the erstwhile Mysuru Royal Family, **Pramodadevi Wadiyar** criticised the state government's decision for Rs 2000 special entry ticket for Goddess Chamun deshwari's darshan during Ashada celebrations starting 17 July.

Wadiyar said, "There is no necessity for the government to introduce such a system,"

She asked if the ticket would be available offline, online, or at the temple, criticising the government's move with no stakeholder consultation.

Wadiyar added, "In the eyes of the public, the introduction of this special entry ticket is not good according to me." *—Salar News*

BJP attacks CM for releasing Cauvery water

BENGALURU, 3 JULY

Chief Minister DK Shivakumar should explain how much water has been released from Krishnaraja Sagar (KRS) Almatti and Narayanpur reservoirs, BJP State President BY Vijayendra said on Friday.

At a press conference, Vijayendra alleged that water from the KRS was being released to the neighbouring state because the Congress is part of the TVK-led ruling coalition, and demanded data. He said that the Congress should be looking to conserve water, while conceding that even Prime Minister Narendra Modi has painted a grim picture for farmers during the upcoming monsoon.

Vijayendra asked whether Shivakumar spoke to Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and made arrangements regarding water releases into the Krishna and other such rivers. He asked if Shivakumar suddenly realised "overnight" that there was drought forecast. "The fate of the State is such because someone who is concerned about real estate is holding power".

Leader of Opposition R Ashoka slammed Shivakumar for his "silence" on Tamil Nadu Congress President B Manickam Tagore MP proposal to launch a protest against the proposed Mekedatu Balancing Reservoir. *—PTI*

"We must proceed in accordance with the directions of the Supreme Court. They themselves have said that excess water is flowing into the sea. They have also said that Kannadigas can make productive use of that water... Personal opinions do not matter here

—Priyank Kharge, Home Minister on Mekedatu

Farmer unions protest in front of the Mahatma Gandhi statue at Gandhi Square in Mysuru on Friday —SALAR

If ryots can't sow, give compensation: HDK

BENGALURU, 3 JULY

Union Minister and JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy slammed Chief Minister DK Shivakumar for telling farmers to rethink before sowing amid the drought-like conditions in the State.

"What us the solution are you providing for their survival?" he told mediapersons on Friday.

"If farmers cannot sow, at least provide them compensation," he said.

He argued that it was the government's responsibility to provide compensation to affected farmers as it was asking them not to sow.

When the entire country is facing a crisis, Kumaraswamy wondered how can the Congress be so shortsighted.

Further, he alleged that the Congress was releasing water from the KRS (Krishna Raja Sagara Dam) dam to Tamil Nadu instead of taking care of farmers in Karnataka and thinking about the State's own drinking water needs.

The water shortage can be particularly noticed in Raichur, where of the total 570,845 hectares, sowing has been completed in only 224,970 hectares. Raichur district received only 6.9 mm of rainfall during the past week, resulting in a rainfall deficit of 14.2 mm compared to the normal. *—Salar News*

Rain in Western Ghats brings relief

Heavy rainfall in Maharashtra's Western Ghats has brought about 4,000 cusecs of water into the Krishna basin through the Rajapur Barrage, easing drinking water and irrigation concerns in Chikkodi taluk. Officials said the inflow has reached Kagawad taluk, benefiting farmers and livestock. *-Salar News*

NEW CM COMPLETES A MONTH

Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, his wife Usha and brother DK Suresh met former CM Siddaramaiah at his residence and had breakfast, one month after the power switch -SALAR

PC Jaffer takes concurrent charge of BMRCL

BENGALURU, 3 JULY

The Karnataka government has given Finance Department Secretary PC Jaffer additional charge as Managing Director of Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL).

Jaffer will hold the position from 26 June to 12 July, while BMRCL MD J Ravishankar is on leave for a "private foreign tour". The development comes close on the heels of back-to-back technical glitches and the electrocution of a Metro contract worker near Trinity Metro Station on 26 June.

Prior, metro services were suspended on a key section of the Purple Line on 23 June, followed by a 17-minute delay in train operations on the same stretch two days later.

Notably, BMRCL has clarified that Ravishankar's leave was pre-planned. According to the corporation, the leave had been approved nearly a month in advance for personal reasons and had no connection to the recent operational disruptions or the contract worker's death.

Ravishankar, a 2001-batch IAS officer and a Bengaluru native, has headed BMRCL for less than a year. *—Agencies*

—SALAR

BJP MP meets Shah on delayed STRR compensation

NEW DELHI, 3 JULY

BJP MP Dr CN Manjunath met Union Home Minister Amit Shah seeking his intervention for early approval of the NH-948A Bengaluru Satellite Town Ring Road (STRR) Project on Friday. In a statement, Manjunath stated that although land was acquired from farmers in 2020-21, many are yet to receive compensation and urged Shah to release the "long-pending" funds. The 281km project includes a 144km stretch that will pass through Bannerghatta forest. "I am confident the Government will ... ensure justice to our farmers," Manjunath said in a statement. *—SALAR NEWS*

POCSO accused escapes custody, arrested again

AFZALPUR, 3 JULY

A man arrested under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and kidnapping escaped from Afzalpur Station on Thursday and was later caught in Afzalpur taluk allegedly attempting to flee to Maharashtra. Manjunath, 21, allegedly escaped from by taking advantage of personnel being asleep. Aland DySP Tammaraya Patil recommended action against Head Constable Ravidas, Constables Shivanand and Prashanth, and Home Guards Shanti Sagar, Shrishail. SP Addur Srinivasulu suspended three personnel. The victim is admitted for medical examination. *—SALAR NEWS*

BLOs give forms at temples, mosques; BJP fumes

KOLAR, 3 JULY

In apparent violation of the Election Commission of India's (ECI) guidelines for the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR), several Booth Level Officers (BLOs) across the State were found conducting verification from places of worship and other centralised areas instead of door-to-door visits.

In Kolar district, Salar News found some 10 such camps on Friday. Temporary pandals had been set up, where voters were asked to gather and furnish the information required for updating the electoral rolls even in Anganwadi centres.

In Kurubarapet, a temple premise had been turned into a voter verification camp, with three to four BLOs simultaneously updating electoral records.

Similarly, with people gathering for Friday prayers, camps were set up near mosques in Kolar. Meanwhile, Kolar Deputy Commissioner Dr Ravi MR urged BLOs to adhere to the ECI's mandate.

In Kolar's Kurubarapet on Friday, a temple became a voter verification hub, with three to four BLOs updating electoral records simultaneously -SALAR

Give forms in Marathi, says MES

The Maharashtra Ekikaran Samiti (MES) in Karnataka, has demanded district administration to make the enumeration forms for SIR available in Marathi. While Kannada- and Marathi-speaking residents in the Belagavi region have generally been accepting the forms, former member of the Belagavi City Corporation Sunil Balekundri refused to accept the form when a BLO visited his residence on Friday. "I can't read Kannada. Therefore, I can't accept this form".

CONG HELPING BANGLADESHIS: LOP

The Opposition has seized on images of Muslims receiving or filling out forms in mosques, alleging Congress wants to shield illegal "Bangladeshis".

"For Bangladeshis, the Congress government has become a paradise," LoP in the Assembly R Ashoka said. "There are about 20 lakh Bangladeshi people in the State, including Bengaluru, Kodagu, and Chikkamagaluru. Their names were not present in the 2002 voter list. Therefore, they have built highways for Bangla residents, openly adding names to the voter lists in front of Haj Bhavans and mosques."

He claimed that in Bengaluru's Mahadevapura and Byatarayanapura groups are sitting at mosques and for the SIR process and vowed to write to the Central and State Election Commissions.

BJP and JD(S) leaders have posting visuals on social media of Muslims at mosque help desks, alleging they are "illegal Bangladeshis". *—Salar News*

SEC conducting parallel SIR: Shobha

BENGALURU, 3 JULY

Union Minister of State Shobha Karandlaje on Friday wrote to Chief Election Commissioner seeking immediate intervention against what she termed a "parallel" Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls initiated by the Karnataka State Election Commission (KSEC) in Assembly constituencies falling within the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA).

"Notwithstanding the ongoing statewide Special Intensive Revision undertaken by the Election Commission of India, the Karnataka State Election Commission has initiated a separate and parallel Special Intensive Revision process... with independent timelines and different cut-off dates," she wrote in the letter.

The Union Minister argued that the parallel exercise could "create confusion among electors, political parties and election officials" and lead to inconsistencies in electoral rolls, thereby affecting the integrity of the electoral process.

"The Karnataka State Election Commission... has no independent authority to prepare or undertake a SIR," she stated, alleging that this was being done to influence the outcome of the GBA polls. *—ANI*

CHILD COMMISSION INVOLVED

Two caretakers arrested for torture at Bengaluru daycare

BENGALURU, 3 JULY

Following the alleged assault by nannies at a Bengaluru daycare centre, the Karnataka State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (KSCPCR) said Friday it has begun reviewing the incident and will decide next steps after examining the facts.

Chairman Santhosh Kumar and member Satyanarayana Shetty said the daycare was found empty when they visited with police.

Officials will consult the government to formulate an SOP after reviewing existing protocols.

Shetty assured that the Commission will ensure the guilty are punished.

Meanwhile, police sources said the two nannies, Manjula and Vijayalakshmi, were

arrested and produced in court, which remanded them to 14 days' judicial custody.

Simultaneously, the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) on Friday took suo-motu cognisance of alleged physical abuse and torture of children at a daycare centre operating in Bengaluru's Brookefield area.

Copies of the letter were sent to Bengaluru Police Commissioner Seemant Kumar Singh, the KSCPCR Chairperson, and Karnataka's Principal Secretary and Director of Women and Child Development.

Commenting on the incident and the subsequent arrest, Karnataka Home Minister Priyank Kharge said the state has zero tolerance for such incidents. He also added that the incident is not only about affecting the reputation of that company but also the 'Brand Bengaluru'.

Priyank said he is waiting on the company's written explanation and noted that matters involving toddlers must be handled with the utmost responsibility. *—Agencies*

Bengaluru to get digital dashboard to report civic woes

BENGALURU, 3 JULY

Bengaluru Development Minister Krishna Byre Gowda on Friday announced that a unified GIS-based digital platform will be developed to integrate information relating to roads, road history, utilities, streetlights and ongoing infrastructure works across departments. Citizens can report civic issues there.

At the meeting, he also directed civic departments to coordinate infrastructure planning and cut disruption amid the ongoing "safe footpath" campaign in the City, where the GBA are clearing alleged encroachment and street vendors.

Chairing the GBA Act executive committee's second meet, Gowda gathered agency heads BWSSB, BESCOM, BMTC, BMRCL, BDA, K-RIDE, Traffic Police and Fire Services to institutionalise coordinated

GBA workers clearing structures from the footpath near SBM Circle in Bengaluru on Friday —MOHAMMED ASAD

planning, citing decades of duplication and wasted funds from siloed work.

He said the objective is to replace silo-based functioning with collaborative governance, where departments work together rather than in isolation.

CM DK Shivakumar said a new footpath policy would ensure pedestrian access, with designated vending zones nd fines up to Rs 1 lakh.

"We must fix specific places for vendors and create an opportunity to keep footpaths clean for citizens to walk. For the business of one person, the entire footpath becomes unusable and people are forced to walk on the road". *—Agencies*

— PTI

Kejriwal urges PM to withdraw E20 fuel programme

NEW DELHI, 3 JULY

Arvind Kejriwal announced he will write to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, urging him to roll back the E20 ethanol-blended petrol programme. He claimed the Centre's statement to the Supreme Court on June 30 labelled E20 as "an experiment," but later denied this. Kejriwal questioned the roll-out, saying, "Any experiment should be limited before large-scale implementation." He raised concerns over declining fuel efficiency, citing reports of reduced mileage, and asked if vehicle owners would be compensated if damaged. Kejriwal urged the government to reconsider, stating he would draft a letter and invite suggestions via social media to protect consumers' interests. —*PTI*

Hazare welcomes stay on M'rashtra RTI rule change

PUNE, 3 JULY

Anna Hazare welcomed the Maharashtra government's decision to stay the amended RTI rules but called for their permanent withdrawal to protect citizens' rights. He announced postponing his planned fast from July 5, saying, "The rules, if implemented, will weaken the RTI structure." Hazare thanked the public for their peaceful protests, which he said influenced the government's decision. He expressed concern that the rules, like higher fees and restricted applications, would dilute the RTI Act. Hazare warned, "If the government leaves the process incomplete, we will launch another agitation." He added he's suspending his fast "not because I trust the government, but to give a chance for positive change."—*PTI*

Bandh against Karni Sena man's murder hits life

JAMSHEDPUR, 3 JULY

Normal life was affected in Jharkhand's Jamshedpur on Friday as BJP and JD(U) workers enforced a dawn-to-dusk bandh to protect against the killing of a Karni Sena leader and the alleged deterioration in the city's law and order situation. Business establishments and educational institutions remained closed. Most commercial vehicles stayed off the roads. Public faced difficulties as autorickshaws and buses did not operate. Bandh supporters blocked key roads and burnt tyres. The city has been witnessing protests ever since Himanshu Singh, 28, was killed in a scuffle with some people at a bar on 27 June. Police have arrested five people, including three minors and imposed ban orders in six police station areas. The bandh was called jointly by the BJP and the JD(U)-led Sarvdaliye Sarv Samaj.—*PTI*

— PTI

Punish the guilty, says Hosabale

Ram Temple thefts hurt Hindus, says RSS

NEW DELHI, 3 JULY

RSS General Secretary Dattatreya Hosabale on Friday said the alleged embezzlement of Ram temple donations has "deeply hurt" the faith of Ram devotees and all of society, and the SIT must ensure the guilty face severe punishment.

"We are all extremely pained and angered by this event," the RSS second-in-command posted on X. It is the organisation's first response to the alleged theft of funds.

Asserting that "anti-Hindu and anti-national forces" are seeking to malign Hindu dharma by exploiting the "unfortunate incident", Hosabale called on all Hindus to display necessary patience and restraint to thwart such "conspiracies". It is natural for Hindu society, including the RSS, to expect the Trust to

RSS General Secretary Dattatreya Hosabale speaks during an interview with PTI in New Delhi —*PTI*

treat this "highly condemnable" incident as an extraordinary matter and to rectify all shortcomings in temple management, he added.

This, Hosabale stressed, is crucial to ensure that the faith and reverence of crores of Ram devotees in the Ayodhya temple remain unbroken.

He noted that the UP government constituted a SIT and has initiated legal proceedings based on its recommendations "at the earnest request" of the Trust. It is essential to ensure that anyone found guilty after the investigation faces severe punishment, he said, emphasising that the current "state of confusion and uncertainty" must end.

"We are confident that through proper management, flawless and transparent operational systems, and an atmosphere imbued with purity, sanctity and true 'dharmikta', the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust will continue to strengthen the faith and trust of Hindu society," he said. — PTI

The loot

Cash recoveries in the case include Rs 20.39 lakh from **Shukla**

Rs 18.07 lakh from **Karunesh Pandey**

Rs 16.82 lakh from **Anukalp Mishra**

Rs 14.25 lakh from **Lavkush Mishra**

Rs 7.32 lakh from **Ramashankar Mishra**

Rs 1 lakh from **Ramashankar Yadav alias Tinnu.**

11 grams of gold

375 grams of silver

USD 1,121. (Rs 1,06,756.02)

Accused Avinash Shukla and Anukalp Mishra inside the cash counting centre of the Ram Temple —*PTI*

SIT to re-audit last 5 years' temple accounts

AYODHYA, 3 JULY

The SIT probing the alleged embezzlement of donations at the Ram temple here will conduct a re-audit of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust's accounts for the past five years after the preliminary probe indicated irregularities, sources said on Friday. The re-audit will cover construction-related expenditure as well as jewellery and other gold and silver items received as donations.

The Ayodhya Police questioned key accused Avinash Shukla after taking him into custody. Shukla, who was involved in donation-counting work, was arrested, and a court on Thursday granted his police custody for 24 hours.

Police sources said Shukla, from whose possession the highest cash recovery in the case has been made so far, is facing intensified legal proceedings. The SIT has so far questioned Trust General Secretary Champat Rai, trustee Anil Mishra and Gopal Rao, who has been associated with the temple's management.

Investigators also seized a box labelled "Ramrajya Kosh", bearing a Paytm QR code, from a yoga centre in Ayodhya where Shukla had been staying for nearly a decade.

Meanwhile, Bageshwar Dham chief Acharya Shastri said on Friday that those responsible for the embezzlement would face punishment.

The alleged embezzlement of donations at the Ram temple came to light on 7 June. An FIR was registered on 25 June based on the UP government's preliminary SIT report.

Eight people associated with the temple's donation-counting process have been arrested so far. —*PTI*

UDDHAV TO START 'RAM RAKSHA' STIR; BJP'S RANE CALLS HIM 'OSAMA'

MUMBAI, 3 JULY

Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray on Friday announced a statewide 'Ram Raksha' agitation from 5 July over alleged donation embezzlement at the Ayodhya temple. This drew immediate backlash from the BJP, with Maharashtra minister Nitesh Rane accusing him of "speaking like a Pakistani agent".

Thackeray will launch the protest on Sunday at the Hanuman temple in Dadar, central Mumbai, where protesters will recite the Hanuman Stotra and Hanuman Chalisa to pressure the BJP into taking responsibility for the alleged donation theft.

Rane, known for making controversial comments, said, "Uddhav Thackeray is speaking (Al Qaeda leader) Osama Bin Laden's language. Places where Uddhav Thackeray performs 'maha aarti' should be 'purified' with 'gomutra' (cow urine)."

Thackeray questioned whether the allegedly stolen money had been used to poach Opposition leaders. —*PTI*

Arlekar's Vaigai meeting ignites row over Guv role

CHENNAI, 3 JULY

Tamil Nadu Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar's review meeting with officials and his remark that Lok Bhavan will step in if the Vaigai River is not restored triggered a political row in the state.

State Energy Resources Minister R Nirmal Kumar lashed out at the governor for holding a review, claiming governors have no authority to conduct inspections.

"The government elected by the people will not permit such actions. Any intervention by the governor in state administration will be strongly condemned," Kumar told officials in Madurai on Friday.

He directed officials not to cooperate with the governor during such inspections without approval from the state government. "Such actions by the governor create confusion and are beyond his constitutional powers," the minister said.

Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar —*PTI*

During his visit to Madurai on 2 July, Arlekar expressed shock over the condition of the Vaigai River and said that the youth of Madurai should take up Vaigai restoration as a mission. Restoring the river is patriotism, he stressed.

"It is not necessary to take up arms and go to war to prove one's patriotism. If no one takes this initiative, the Lok Bhavan will step in," the governor had said while speaking at a Madurai college.

Arlekar later held a review meeting with district officials for over an hour, a source said.

State Social Justice Minister Vanni Arasu criticised Arlekar, accusing him of "interfering in the affairs" of the elected government and " remaining silent on issues affecting Tamil Nadu."

Pointing to the Mekedatu dam dispute, Vanni Arasu sought to know if Arlekar would back Tamil Nadu's stance on opposing the Karnataka government's attempt to construct the proposed balancing reservoir across the Cauvery River.

Leader of the Opposition DMK Udhayanidhi Stalin termed the governor's action as an "overreach that violates the state's rights." — *PTI*

KARUR STAMPEDE

DMK moves SC, wants TVK leaders gagged

The plea filed by DMK organising secretary RS Bharathi said that many persons who were initially chargesheeted are now ministers—*PTI*

NEW DELHI, 3 JULY

The DMK moved the Supreme Court on Friday seeking a direction to restrain TVK leaders including Chief Minister C Joseph Vijay from making public statements or levelling "false accusations" in connection with the Karur stampede in which 41 people were killed.

The plea filed by DMK organising secretary RS Bharathi, who sought impleadment in a pending case, submitted that many persons who were initially chargesheeted are now ministers in the Tamil Nadu Cabinet.

The petition referred to a public statement allegedly made on Thursday by TN minister Aadhav Arjuna, in which he allegedly said that there was "a score to settle" over the Karur incident and alleged that the DMK government had "killed" Karur people through the police. — *PTI*

Five more held for bid to bribe TVK MLA

CHENNAI, 3 JULY

Five more have been arrested on the allegation of an attempt to bribe a TVK MLA, making this the eighth arrest, police said.

Following a complaint from TVK's legislator N Elaiyaraja, representing Uthangarai Assembly constituency in Krishnagiri district, the Triplicane police arrested Selvan of Pallikaranai; E M Srinivasan, 46, of Madambakkam; Rajesh, 43, of Chromepet; Karthik, 43, and Ramesh, 45, of Karur district.

Thirunavukkarasu of Arumbakkam along with Naresh of Tiruchirappalli and Thiyagarajan of Medavakkam were arrested on 1 July and remanded. In his complaint, Elaiyaraja said he received a phone call from Thirunavukkarasu, of the Indian Political Democratic Strategies (IPDS), claiming that a major political party had offered him Rs 35 crore to vote in favour of the "no confidence motion" against the Speaker in the Assembly. The MLA claimed he was threatened, and his family was intimidated. He urged the police to act against Thirunavukarasu.

During the probe, it emerged that Karthik and Ramesh met Naresh at an ECR star hotel, seeking his support for the no-trust motion.

Through friend Thiyagarajan, Naresh got Srinivasan, Selvan and Rajesh to a Guindy hotel to plot the MLA's bribery. The five appeared in court on 2 July and were remanded to custody. —*PTI*

Mamata, Abhishek may file affidavits in contempt case

KOLKATA, 3 JULY

The Calcutta HC on Friday directed Trinamool Congress chairperson Mamata Banerjee and general secretary Abhishek Banerjee to file affidavits in a contempt petition alleging violation of the court's direction on blocking arterial roads during the party's 21 July Martyrs' Day rally in 2025.

The petitioner alleged contempt of the high court's order passed in May 2018, which had directed that meetings or gatherings on thoroughfares must not cause total blockage of the road. A division bench presided by Justice Arijit Banerjee directed Mamata Banerjee and Abhishek Banerjee to file affidavits within four weeks stating their stand over the allegation in the contempt petition.

The court directed the petitioner to file his affidavit in reply to the contention of the TMC leaders within the subsequent two weeks.

The division bench, also comprising Justice Apurba Sinha Ray, directed that the matter will appear for next hearing on 17 August. — *PTI*

CONGRESS ROW

Channi's supporters want him made Punjab Congress chief

CHANDIGARH, 3 JULY

Supporters of former Punjab chief minister Charanjit Singh Channi gathered at his Morinda residence on Friday, demanding he be made the state unit chief.

Similarly, some former party MLAs concurred that if the Congress returns to power in Punjab in next year's election, the former chief minister should be made president of the state unit.

The development comes after the party's central leadership decided on Wednesday to retain Amrinder Singh Raja Warring as the state unit chief.

Channi is said to be miffed at not being appointed to the post. He is reported to have not even made a customary call to thank the party leadership following the new announcements.

Channi's supporters have expressed disappointment over not being given the post for which the former Punjab chief minister had been lobbying hard.

Among those who reached Channi's residence were former deputy chief minister OP Soni, former MP Mohd Sadiq and sitting MLA Tript Rajinder Singh Bajwa.

Sukhjinder Singh Randhawa—who has been appointed as the committee chairperson—and Channi are seen as contenders for the state unit president. —*PTI*

75TH ANNIVERSARY

Cricket, anime, art events to celebrate India-Japan ties

NEW DELHI, 3 JULY

A friendship cricket match, a platform to catalyse direct linkages between Indian business clusters and Japanese regional banks, and a host of other colourful activities to promote art, culture of the two countries and people-to-people ties will be held to mark the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between India and Japan next year.

The two governments, in cooperation with their respective stakeholders, will celebrate 2027 as the 'India-Japan Year of Shared Horizons', the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) announced on Thursday.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Japanese counterpart Sanae Takaichi also spoke about the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, during the latter's visit to India that concluded on Friday.

The MEA in a statement said, "Both sides will work together in planning and holding commemorative programmes, throughout the year and across the nations, with particular participation of the youth of both countries."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacts with Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi during the latter's visit in New Delhi —*PTI*

The week of 28 April 2027 will be designated as the "India–Japan Week" to mark the establishment of diplomatic ties es, it said.

India-Japan relations were elevated to Global Partnership in 2000, Strategic and Global Partnership in 2006, and Special Strategic and Global Partnership in 2014. —*PTI*

ODISHA SIGNS RS 67K CRORE DEAL WITH JAPAN'S ACME GROUP

BHUBANESWAR, 3 JULY

The Odisha government on Friday signed a Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) with the ACME Group and Japan's IHI Corporation for a proposed investment of Rs 67,000 crore.

The development comes a day after Prime Minister Modi held talks with his Japanese counterpart Sanae Takaichi in New Delhi. The collaboration reflects the commitment of the state government, IHI Corporation and the ACME Group to explore opportunities for establishing large-scale clean energy projects in Odisha, a statement said.

Chief Minister Mohan Majhi said Odisha aims to establish one of the largest green hydrogen ecosystems in the country.

He said that Odisha has already approved 12 major green hydrogen and green ammonia projects. —*PTI*

Teen on way to U'khand disaster rescue drill drowns

HALDWANI, 3 JULY

A 17-year-old boy drowned after being swept away by the strong currents of the Kosi River in Uttarakhand's Nainital district. Vishal Singh, from Simalkha village, was on his way to witness a disaster management mock drill near Kali Pahadi. While crossing the river, he lost his balance and was carried away. The SDRF team responded immediately, rescued him, and took him to hospital, where doctors declared him dead. The incident occurred during a drill organised by police, administration, SDRF, and other departments on the Shaheed Balwant Singh Bhujan-Bardho road. Vishal was heading there to watch the event, officials said. —*PTI*

— PTI

M'rashtra to ban sale of 'Sting' drink near schools

MUMBAI, 3 JULY

The Maharashtra government announced a ban on selling 'Sting' energy drinks and other intoxicants within 500 metres of schools. Food and Drug Administration Minister Narhari Zirwal said the decision was made over concerns about ingredients considered unsuitable for children. He added, "If the sale of such energy drinks or any other intoxicating substances is found within 500 metres of a school campus, immediate action will be taken." The government will enforce the restriction, and schools will be asked to conduct awareness programmes about health risks. MLAs Rahul Kul and Varun Sardesai urged stricter measures, while Zirwal said the government would strengthen awareness campaigns and ensure proper implementation. —*PTI*

— PTI

HP urges farmers to insure crops before 31 July

HAMIRPUR, 3 JULY

The Himachal Pradesh government has urged farmers to insure their kharif maize and paddy crops before 31 July to access crop insurance benefits. The Prime Minister's Crop Insurance Scheme covers losses from natural disasters like droughts, floods, and hailstorms. Deputy Director D D Sharma said, "The deadline for insuring crops is 31 July," adding that all tehsils in Hamirpur are notified for maize insurance, while Hamirpur, Nadaun, and Bhoranj are notified for paddy. Farmers can insure crops by visiting Lok Mitra Kendra, banks, or online using their ID and land documents. Indebted farmers will be automatically insured, with a premium of Rs 48 per canal and Rs 1,200 per hectare, insuring Rs 60,000 per hectare. —*PTI*

Probe launched into sexual assault of disabled girl

KASARAGOD, 7 JULY

An investigation has been launched after a differently-abled minor girl was allegedly sexually assaulted by five persons in last year in this district, police said on Friday. Officials at the Bekal Police Station said that cases have been registered against five people in connection with the incidents. It was following the information given by the parents of the 17-year-old that an investigation was launched recently. Police said the survivor was sexually assaulted by five persons on different occasions last year. The girl revealed it to her parents only last month, police said. —*PTI*

SC halts Delhi govt's CAG audit of private discoms

Maintain status quo till 15 July, says court

NEW DELHI, 3 JULY

The Supreme Court halted a CAG audit ordered by the Delhi government of three private discoms against the backdrop of a staggering Rs 38,500 crore accumulated over the years as Regulatory Assets (RA) to be recovered from consumers.

Justices KV Viswanathan and Shree Chandrashekhar ordered a status quo on Friday, saying the legality of the power regulator Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission's (DERC) decision to appoint the CAG gives rise to questions.

In a setback to the BJP-led Delhi government, the SC ordered, "There shall be a stay of the Appellate Tribunal for Electricity (APTEL) direction appointing any CA for audit. The CAG shall also not proceed with the audit."

The SC was hearing the DERC's plea against an April ruling of the APTEL, which had held that entrusting the audit to the CAG was contrary to law and directed the regulator to appoint an independent CA for the audit.

The SC said the status quo should be maintained till 15 July, when the DERC's plea is taken up for hearing by a regular bench, which had pronounced the verdict last August.

At that time, Justice P S Narasimha had directed that the regulatory assets, worth Rs 27,200 crore, be paid within three years to Delhi's three private discoms.

The bench then said that the Regulatory Assets (RAs), essentially deferred revenue gaps to be recovered in future tariffs, have risen sharply, reaching Rs 12,993 crore for BSES Rajdhani Power Ltd (BRPL), Rs 8,419 crore for BSES Yamuna Power Ltd (BYPL) and Rs 5,787 crore for Tata Power Delhi Distribution Ltd (TPDDL) as on 31 March 2024, totalling Rs 27,200 crore.

The 2025 verdict came on the petitions filed by three private discoms against the DERC's tariff orders that led to the ballooning of RAs. Now the RAs stand at Rs 38,500 crore. — *PTI*

SC allows Sonam's bail in honeymoon murder case

NEW DELHI, 3 JULY

The Supreme Court on Friday refused to stay the Meghalaya High Court order granting bail to Sonam Raghuvanshi, accused of murdering her husband during their honeymoon in 2025.

Justices MM Sundresh and Sheel Nagu expressed reservation over the high court order but refused to stay it, noting that Sonam has been released from jail and is in Shillong as per the bail conditions imposed by the trial court.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the state, said the allegations against Sonam were serious and that she cannot be released on technical grounds.

Mehta sought a stay on the high court order but the bench refused to grant the relief. The bench posted the matter for hearing after reopening of the SC.

On Thursday, the Meghalaya government moved the Supreme Court against the bail granted to the prime accused in the case.

Sonam Raghuvanshi, a resident of Indore in Madhya Pradesh, was arrested in June 2025 in connection with the murder of her businessman husband Raja Raghuvanshi.

The couple had gone missing while vacationing in Meghalaya's Sohra area on 23 May 2025. Subsequently, Raja's body was found in a deep gorge on 2 June 2025.

Police alleged that Sonam Raghuvanshi conspired with hired assailants to kill her husband for money.

On 29 June, the Meghalaya HC had upheld a trial court order granting bail to Sonam. — *PTI*

HC cuts man's lifer citing wife's '1,000 husbands' barb

JABALPUR, 3 JULY

The Madhya Pradesh High Court reduced the life sentence of a man accused of killing his pregnant wife to seven years jail, noting that the assault was not "premeditated" but a "sudden and grave provocation" due to her remark that she "can keep a thousand husbands" like him.

In its verdict delivered on 18 June, Justices Vivek Agarwal and Avanindra Kumar Singh noted that the remark made by the woman was an indirect reference which meant that the husband has no value as a human being or a husband.

The prosecution said, Shiva Kahar murdered his wife Kiran on 18 September 2021, when she was seven months pregnant. Kahar struck her on the head with a stone, resulting in her death. After the incident, he called his father-in-law and informed the police about his wife's murder, following which he was arrested.

The accused had stated in his statement that on the day of the incident, he and his wife Kiran had an argument, during which she said, "I will have a thousand husbands like you." This angered him and he hit Kiran on the head with a stone, which led to her death. — *PTI*

Many candidates said they got stuck on the Bareilly-Badaun Road due to the BJP roadshow and could not reach their exam centres—*SCREENGRAB*

BJP's roadshow hits UP TET candidates

BUDAUN, 3 JULY

Traffic jams allegedly caused by Uttar Pradesh BJP vice-president Durvijay Singh Shakya's roadshow triggered a political row here on Friday after many TET candidates said they missed the second shift of the Teacher Eligibility Test.

The district administration acknowledged that some candidates could not reach their examination centres in the district on time and said it would write to the state government seeking permission for them to reappear.

District Magistrate Avinash Kumar Rai said that despite traffic diversions, heavy rain and the BJP leader's convoy affecting traffic, resulted in some candidates missing the Uttar Pradesh Teacher Eligibility Test (UP-TET).

"We will correspond with the state government and ensure that candidates who could not appear due to the delay are given another opportunity," Rai said.

Asked whether permission had been granted for the roadshow, the district magistrate said no permission had been taken.

As per official figures, 4,875 of the 5,639 candidates appeared in the first shift, while 764 were absent. In the second shift, 4,455 of 5,639 candidates appeared and 1,184 were absent -- 420 more absentees than in the first shift. The administration, however, did not attribute the higher absenteeism solely to the traffic snarls.

But many candidates said that they got stranded for hours on the Bareilly-Badaun Road due to VIP movement and could not reach their examination centres.

Samajwadi Party MP Aditya Yadav accused the government of jeopardising the future of candidates and demanded that those who missed the examination due to the traffic congestion must be given another chance. — *PTI*

Google search helps find missing Sindhudurg woman

THANE, 3 JULY

A mentally ill woman who had been missing from Maharashtra's Sindhudurg district for two months has been reunited with her family, thanks to Google Search and the efforts of a local social organisation, representatives said Friday. Pooja Bhagwan Gawas, a resident of Vajare village, went missing from home in May and was later found in the streets of Sawantwadi town, according to an official. Police admitted her to Sanvita Ashram, run by Jeevan Anand Sanstha.

Kisan Choure, a trustee at the organisation, used Google Search along with help from the authorities to trace her family to Vajare. Relatives identified her from a photo, and she was reunited with them on Thursday. — *PTI*

MUMBAI RED ALERT

Commuters drive through a waterlogged road in Mumbai during the heavy monsoon rains in the metropolis on Friday. The IMD has issued a red alert in Mumbai on Saturday warning of heavy rains —*PTI*

NHAI SUSPENDS OFFICIALS AFTER DELHI-DEHRADUN E-WAY CAVES IN

The road cave-in seen on the Delhi–Dehradun Economic Corridor on 1 July 2026 was the result of localised water stagnation—*ANI*

NEW DELHI, 3 JULY

After a video of a section of the Delhi-Dehradun Expressway caving in went viral, the NHAI suspended the leader of the authority's engineering team and the project manager of the contractor although as it said the cave-in was due to water stagnation after rains.

The NHAI said it has also issued show cause notices to the project director, authority engineer and EPC contractor.

The road cave-in observed on the Delhi–Dehradun Economic Corridor on 1 July 2026 was the result of localised water stagnation after rains. The NHAI said the permanent cross-drainage system at the location could not be commissioned due to objections from local residents, who did not permit integration of the balancing culvert and instead used the culvert opening as a traffic crossing point. — *PTI*

US firm fires 900 staffers at its Keralam centre, govt steps in

KOCHI, 3 JULY

Around 900 medical coding professionals at the Indian centre of a US-based healthcare analytics firm were abruptly terminated when they reported for duty on Friday morning, prompting immediate intervention by the Kerala government. The affected staff, in the company's offices in Kochi and Kozhikode, alleged they were forced out without prior notice or adherence to contractual notice periods.

Following protests by the terminated workers outside the company premises, local Congress MLA Uma Thomas intervened to challenge the management's decision.

The Kerala labour department subsequently stepped into the dispute to examine the legality of the layoff.

MLA Uma Thomas contacted Labour Minister Bindhu Krishna following the employees' protest. Uma told reporters that she had spoken to the company representatives in Kochi and said that sudden terminations would seriously affect employees. "They have agreed to provide compensation as per the directions of the labour officer," she said.

The MLA said the priority was to ensure that the employees continued in service.

"The labour secretary will come on 6 July and hold talks," she said. Labour officials said they had held discussions with the company in Kochi and decided to keep the termination process on hold.

The officials said the company has assured them that any decision on the terminations would be taken only after the labour secretary's meeting with the management. — *PTI*

J&K mutton crisis ends as Punjab scraps 4 pc tax

SRINAGAR, 3 JULY

Kashmir's mutton crisis was resolved after the Punjab government revoked the levy imposed on vehicles transporting livestock through the state, after the intervention of CM Omar.

All Kashmir Mutton Dealers Association president Khazir Mohammad Regoo announced on Friday that the dispute over the alleged "illegal" levy imposed on Kashmiri meat traders has been resolved. Kashmir had been facing an acute shortage of mutton ever since the Punjab government imposed a 4 per cent tax on vehicles carrying livestock through the state. "The matter has been resolved after Punjab revoked the levy," Regoo said.

He said the association's coordination committee camped in Punjab and took up the issue with the government there. — *PTI*

BENGALURU IISC STUDY

Ultrasound can selectively destroy cancer cells

NEW DELHI, 3 JULY

Oral cancer cells might be vulnerable to ultrasound and the technique may help to attack them leaving healthy cells unharmed, a new study by the Bengaluru Indian Institute of Science (IISc) found.

The vulnerability appears to arise due to reduced levels of Tropomyosin 2.1, a mechanosensory protein that helps body cells withstand mechanical stimulation.

Working with patient-derived oral tumour samples, the team including clinicians of the MS Ramaiah Medical College and Hospitals explored whether low-frequency ultrasound mechanical stimulation could selectively kill oral cancer cells.

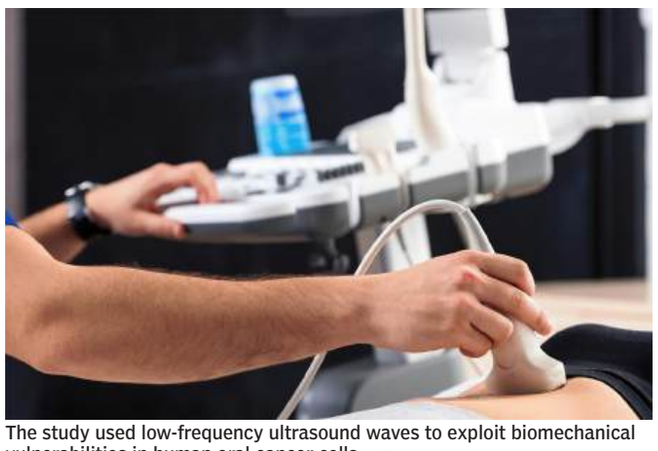
When exposed to ultrasound-driven mechanical stimulation, oral cancer cells underwent selective cell death, while healthy oral epithelial cells remained unharmed. The findings are published in the journal 'Materials Today Bio.'

"The study shows how ultrasound mechanostimulation can target oral cancer cells by exploiting their mechanical weakness," author Ajay Tijore, assistant professor at the department of bioengineering, IISc, said.

Ultrasound makes use of high-frequency sound waves to create real-time pictures of internal organs.

The study used low-frequency ultrasound to exploit biomechanical vulnerabilities in oral cancer cells.

The team also found that ultrasound drastically reduced the cancer cells' ability to migrate and invade surrounding tissue.



The study used low-frequency ultrasound waves to exploit biomechanical vulnerabilities in human oral cancer cells—*PTI*

Using a 3D co-culture platform mimicking the oral tumour microenvironment, the team found that ultrasound disrupted the dense capsule-like barrier formed by cancer-associated cells around the tumour core.

- Working with oral tumour samples, the team including clinicians of the MS Ramaiah Medical College and Hospitals examined whether low-frequency ultrasound mechanical stimulation could kill oral cancer cells

"What surprised us most was the consistency of the response across cancer cells derived from multiple patients from different cancer stages. They were highly vulnerable to ultrasound," first author Rashmita Luha, a PhD candidate said. — *PTI*

Iran is all set for Khamenei's funeral and burial

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Months after the killing of Iran's supreme leader at the start of its war with the United States and Israel, mourners will hold a days-long funeral and burial for the late Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

The mourning period will see Khamenei's body carried through cities in both Iran and neighbouring Iraq. Iran's theocracy likely will encourage the public, government employees and paramilitary forces to fill the streets in his honour.

Khamenei, who led Iran for nearly four decades, was killed on 28 February when the US and Israel jointly launched the war. The funeral was delayed as the war raged.

The funeral will serve as a test for Iran's battered theocracy and its ability to summon a mass show of support, particularly as the funeral comes six months after security forces' crackdown on nationwide protests against Khamenei's rule.

A large turnout also could raise the risk of deadly stampedes. One marred the funeral of Iran's first supreme leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

An uneasy ceasefire period, capped by an interim deal with the United States, likely gave authorities the confidence to hold the ceremony and have top officials appear. Israel throughout the war killed senior leaders, in at least one case using public appearances to track them.

But it remains unclear whether Khamenei's son, Iran's new Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, will make his first public appearance during the ceremonies. The younger Khamenei, believed to have been wounded in the attack that killed his father, remains in hiding.

Here's what to know about the funeral set to begin Saturday in Iran's capital, Tehran.

KHAMENEI'S FUNERAL TO LAST FOR DAYS

Khamenei's body will be on display at Tehran's Grand Mosalla on Saturday and Sunday. On Monday, it will be paraded through the streets of Tehran before being taken to the Shiite seminary city of Qom, some 120 km to the south. Tuesday will see Khamenei honoured there.

On Wednesday, Khamenei's body will be taken to Karbala, Iraq, home to the shrine of Imam Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad who long has been a symbol of resistance for the Shiite faithful. Wednesday also will mark the anniversary of the protests against Khamenei's rule, which saw thousands killed by security forces.

Khamenei finally will be brought to Mashhad, Iran's second-largest city.

KHAMENEI WILL BE BURIED AT A HOLY SHIITE SHRINE

Authorities say Khamenei will be buried in Mashhad at the Imam Reza shrine.

Imam Reza was Shiite Islam's eighth imam. Millions of pilgrims visit the shrine each year. A hadith, or saying, states that anyone with sorrow or sin will be relieved by visiting there.

Many prominent Shiite clerics have been buried there, as was Iran's late President Ebrahim Raisi, who was killed in a helicopter crash in 2024.

AYATOLLAH RUHOLLAH KHOMEINI'S FUNERAL SAW MILLIONS

On 6 June, 1989, millions of Iranians turned out in the streets to bury Khomeini, who led the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The situation quickly got out of control. People beat their chests rhythmically in the summer heat, the wails of women cutting through the noise.

Mourners rushed the casket, causing the 86-year-old religious leader's white-wrapped body to tumble into the crowd. Initial reports said the chaos killed at least eight people and hurt some 11,000 others.

There's concern that a similar stampede may break out during Khamenei's funeral, should the crowds be into the millions. The burial of the late Revolutionary Guard Gen. Qassem Soleimani saw a stampede that killed at least 56 people and hurt more than 2000 in 2020.

IRAN WAR INTERIM DEAL IS CHALLENGED

The interim deal reached in June created a 60-day window to negotiate terms of a final deal to end the Iran war, including the issues of Iran's nuclear program and the Strait of Hormuz.

Technical talks began in Qatar this week, but they have been complicated by deep disagreements, and several days of crossfire between the US and Iran, over the future of the strait. *—PTI*

In this image posted on 3 July, 2026, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) president Mehbooba Mufti and others attend the funeral ceremony of Iran's slain supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, in Tehran. *—PTI*

SALAR

App-based battery shut-downs haunt e-rickshaw

- Many e-rickshaw drivers operating across Delhi's busy Metro corridors say they are living in fear after a smartphone application allegedly began shutting down their vehicles in the middle of the road without warning, leaving them stranded amid speeding traffic and exposing passengers to the risk of serious accidents

Many e-rickshaw drivers operating across Delhi's busy Metro corridors say they are living in fear after a smartphone application allegedly began shutting down their vehicles in the middle of the road without warning, leaving them stranded amid speeding traffic and exposing passengers to the risk of serious accidents.

Safety concerns have emerged after videos circulated on social media purportedly showed people using a Chinese Bluetooth-enabled battery management application to remotely switch off compatible lithium-ion battery-powered e-rickshaws.

Following the circulation of the videos, the Delhi government has ordered a probe into the claims.

Drivers plying on some of Delhi's busiest routes told PTI that an unexpected shutdown on arterial roads could prove fatal as vehicles often travel close behind e-rickshaws, leaving little time to react.

Shree Ram, who ferries passengers between Punjabi Bagh West Metro and Peeragarhi Metro, said the route witnesses heavy traffic throughout the day and e-rickshaws often have to wait for passengers on both ends.

"I have heard that several e-rickshaws suddenly stopped on the main road. When a vehicle comes to a halt in the middle of traffic, it becomes dangerous as speeding vehicles approach from behind," Ram said.

He said the situation could turn fatal for both passengers and drivers.

"We constantly fear that someone may ram into us from behind," he said.

Ankush Kumar, who operates between West Enclave and Pitampura, said he initially believed repeated shutdowns were due to a battery malfunction.

"My e-rickshaw kept switching off. I thought there was a battery fault and spent Rs 500 to get it checked, but no defect was found. Later I came to know that everything was happening because of this Chinese app. When the vehicle stops, passengers refuse to pay and simply board another e-rickshaw. What may look like a joke to some people has become life-threatening for us on the road," he said.

Kumar said drivers were not only suffering financial losses but were also under constant mental stress while driving in congested traffic.

According to reports, some lithium-ion battery packs used in e-rickshaws come equipped with Bluetooth-enabled Battery Management Systems (BMS) that allow users to monitor battery health through dedicated mobile applications. Security experts say certain battery systems lack adequate authentication, allowing anyone within Bluetooth range to connect and disable the battery's discharge function, bringing the vehicle to an abrupt halt. Older lead-acid battery-powered e-rickshaws are generally not affected.

The issue has gained attention after multiple videos surfaced online showing content creators approaching moving or parked e-rickshaws, connecting to compatible batteries and remotely switching off the vehicles.

The videos have drawn criticism from social media users, many of whom warned that such acts could result in fatal road accidents.

Another e-rickshaw driver Mohammad Siraj, who operates on the Kohat Enclave-Netaji Subhash Place route, claimed that some people were allegedly locking batteries through the application.

"Some people are locking the battery using the app. Now e-rickshaw drivers also have to download the same application to unlock it in an emergency. Sometimes only the person who has the app can unlock the battery. It is creating huge problems for drivers. If the e-rickshaw stops on the main road, it becomes a major safety risk. Police should take action against such app users," Siraj added.

The Delhi government has directed the Transport Department to verify the authenticity of the claims and examine the safety implications. *—PTI*

A viral video shows distressed driver after miscreants disabled his e-rickshaw using mobile app that exploit Bluetooth vulnerabilities in battery management systems *—SCREENGRAB @INSTAGRAM*

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

World's oceans are hottest on record for June, El Nino will turn

The world's oceans are the hottest on record for June, pushing past records set during the 2023–24 El Nino years.

Right now, the average sea surface temperature is just under 21°C across the world's tropical and temperate oceans. Before widespread industrialisation in 1870, the temperature was about 19.6°C.

That may not sound like a big difference. But heating the world's oceans this much requires a truly enormous amount of energy. Of all the extra heat trapped by greenhouse gases from burning coal, gas and oil, more than 90 per cent has gone into the world's oceans.

As a result, the oceans are getting rapidly warmer. In 2025, the heat added was the equivalent of about 12 Hiroshima-scale nuclear bombs exploding every second of every day.

To find a climate analogue comparable to what's happening now in the oceans, we would have to go back around 120,000 years to before the last ice age. Back then, slow shifts in Earth's orbit led it to heat up gradually over thousands of years. Humans have accomplished a similar result in a little over a century.

But the heat in the ocean doesn't just stay there. Hotter oceans fuel stronger cyclones, a more humid atmosphere, more intense rainfall and more heat in air masses over the seas, which can in turn make heatwaves over land more likely and more intense.

The El Nino forming in the tropical Pacific right now is likely to be a big one. As it develops, we can expect to see warmer temperatures and extreme events such as marine heatwaves in the western Indian, tropical Atlantic and eastern Pacific Oceans.

WHERE ARE THE HOTSPOTS ON LAND AND IN THE OCEAN?

Europe is sweltering through a record-breaking heatwave. The oceans surrounding the region and in enclosed seas are also exceptionally hot.

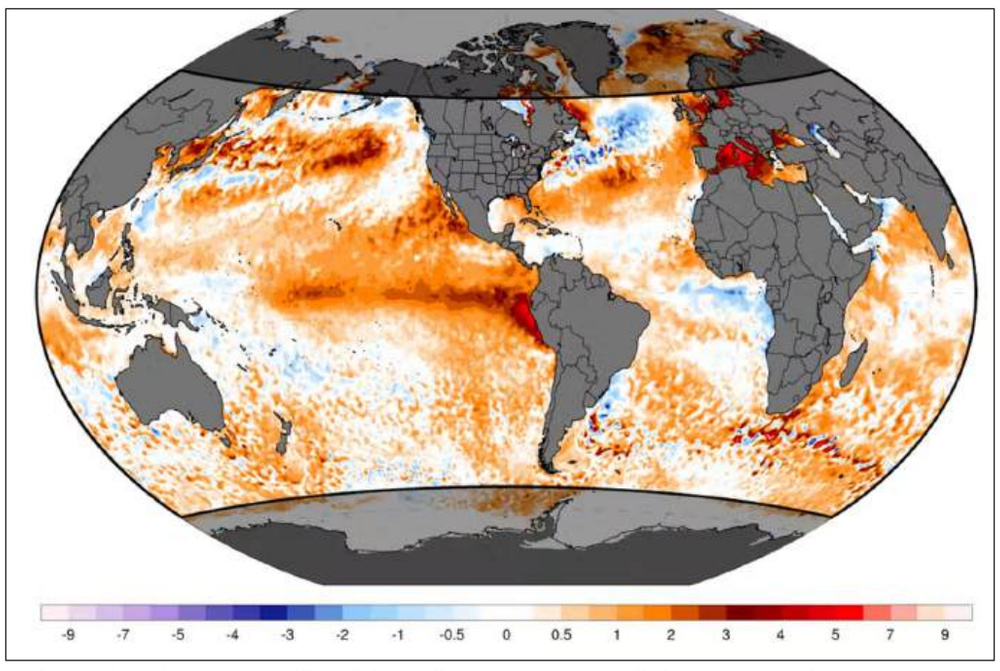
Parts of the Mediterranean are up to 6°C hotter than the long-term average.

Parts of the North Sea are up to 3°C warmer than average.

The forming El Nino has led to sea surface temperatures about 1.24°C warmer than average across a large area of the central eastern Pacific.

There's much more heat below the surface as well. Subsurface conditions in the eastern Pacific are more than 6°C above average.

A typical El Nino lasts about a year. The full effect on atmospheric heat becomes clearest towards the end of the cycle.



Regions such as the eastern Pacific and the Mediterranean are unusually hot at present. This map shows temperature anomalies on 30 June, 2026 *–CLIMATE REANALYZER, CC BY-NC-ND*

That means while we can expect 2026 to be very hot – perhaps a new record – next year is very likely to be even hotter, as ocean heat is moved back to the surface. We saw this during El Nino events over 2023–24 and 2015–16.

Steady ocean warming coupled with longer-lasting and more intense marine heatwaves pose huge threats to marine ecosystems such as coral reefs, sea grass meadows and coastal reefs. Research on the 2023–24 El Nino and the warm 2024 year showed widespread impacts.

FROM OCEANS TO LAND

What happens in the oceans doesn't stay there.

In June 2023, a record-breaking marine heatwave broke previous temperature records across the North Atlantic Ocean. Soon afterwards, large areas of Europe were hit by intense heatwaves, while extreme rains triggered deadly floods in Spain and severe bushfires broke out around the Mediterranean.

Rising ocean temperatures have many consequences.

A warmer ocean is less able to cool the land over summer. Warmer oceans also lead to more evaporation, boosting humidity and fuelling more intense and more sudden extreme rain and floods. These can have devastating consequences.

During El Nino events, there's a clear geographical pattern. The regions we expect to be warmer or cooler during an El Nino roughly reflect where we are more or less likely to get marine heatwaves and more intense tropical cyclones.

Typical cyclone areas such as the western Indian Ocean could see stronger cyclones dumping heavier rainfall when they hit land. El Nino tends to bring extreme rain and floods to the western South America and dry conditions over parts of Australia and Southeast Asia.

CAN WE PREPARE?

We are gaining a better understanding of how big climate drivers like El Nino shape weather and how to use ocean data from around the world to develop better seasonal forecasts authorities can use to prepare.

Over the past two years, we have improved our ability to forecast marine heatwaves three to four months ahead in Australia, the United States and other regions. Forecasts give marine authorities a chance to act early by reducing allowable fishery catches and beginning conservation efforts for vulnerable species.

This early success in ocean forecasting may be short-lived. The current US administration last year slashed funding for climate data gathering networks and has worked to dismantle the National Center for Atmospheric Research.

This year, the administration announced it would end funding for a key ocean monitoring network before backing down.

Ongoing collection of ocean data is crucial for ocean and land forecasts. If they are weakened or discontinued, we could face the challenge of dealing with worsening climate impacts blind.

Ending the measuring of climate change won't stop it happening. The only way to keep climate change from steadily worsening is to reach net zero as soon as humanly possible. Until then, we must use forecasts to prepare for what we can't avoid.

—The Conversation

Pegasus used to spy on European MP: Report

TORONTO, 3 JULY

Researchers at Citizen Lab, University of Toronto, revealed that NSO Group's Pegasus spyware was repeatedly used against Stelios Kouloglou, a Greek former MEP investigating spyware abuse. Although the team could not attribute the attacks to a specific government, they noted similarities with previous campaigns targeting exiled Russian and Belarusian journalists. His device was first infected around October 2022, during Pega committee investigations, and again in March 2023. The report marked the first known targeting of a Pega committee member. The same attacker likely targeted seven other journalists and opposition figures in Europe, using a unique Apple ID email. *—PTI*

—SCREENGRAB

40 killed in bus accident in Pakistan's KP

PESHAWAR, 3 JULY

A tragic bus accident in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, northwest Pakistan, resulted in at least 40 deaths, including women and children. The bus, travelling from Quetta, Balochistan, fell into a ravine near Dera Ismail Khan after brake failure caused the driver to lose control. Preliminary investigations suggest the mountainous terrain and poor vehicle conditions contributed to the crash. The accident occurred during the bus's journey, with 48 passengers onboard. Rescue teams and district authorities are providing assistance, with identification of victims underway. The incident underscores the dangers of mountainous roads in Pakistan, where treacherous terrain, weather, and traffic violations often lead to fatalities. *—PTI*

Indonesia separatists kill American pilot

JAKARTA, 3 JULY

Indonesian security forces on Friday recovered the body of American pilot Nicholas F. Goselin, who was killed after armed separatists attacked and burned his aircraft in Papua Highlands province. Goselin, flying for PT AMA, was shot after landing at Ipdeheik airstrip in Yahukimo regency. The West Papua Liberation Army claimed responsibility, saying civilian flights into its operational zones were banned and alleging such aircraft supported Indonesian military operations. The military denied the claim, saying the plane carried seven indigenous Papuan civilians, who escaped unharmed. The US Embassy did not immediately comment. The decades-long insurgency in Papua has intensified recently, with separatists repeatedly targeting foreign pilots. *—PTI*

UN sounds 'red alert' over possible atrocities in Sudan

GENEVA, 3 JULY

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk on Friday warned of a looming humanitarian catastrophe in and around Sudan's strategic city of el-Obeid, urging world leaders to act urgently to prevent further atrocities. Calling the situation a "red alert", Turk said, "This is not a drill," and urged governments to intensify diplomatic efforts. Civilians in the city have endured 18 months of siege-like conditions, drone strikes and severe shortages of food, water, fuel and healthcare. The RSF has intensified offensives after the military broke its year-long siege in February. Sudan's conflict has killed at least 59,000 people and displaced about 13 million since April 2023. *—PTI*

Iran prepares to say goodbye to Khamenei

Millions to attend as dignitaries from dozens of countries arrive

Chinese dignitaries and Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif arrive in Iran as Tehran begins mourning the demise of former supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei *—x*

TEHRAN, 3 JULY

Iran prepared on Friday for the dayslong funeral of the late supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, with banners across Tehran urging the public to rise up in support of the Islamic Republic after the US and Iran killed the 86-year-old cleric on 28 February.

The country's theocracy plans to see millions flood the streets of the capital beginning on Saturday in scenes reminiscent to the burial of the late supreme leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1989.

That could provide a boost for Iran's government, particularly as it tries to leverage its hold on the Strait of Hormuz in negotiations with the US over a permanent end to the war.

Ahmad Vahidi, the powerful head of Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) also emerged publicly for the first time in months for the funeral. Other top government officials will also likely will be on hand alongside foreign dignitaries in a show of strength of Iran.

Current Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei, Ali's son, is likely to skip the funeral as Israel has said he is "marked for death".

Ali's flag-draped coffin sat at Tehran's Grand Mosalla alongside family members, including Mojtaba's wife and children, who were killed in the US-Israeli airstrike.

Religious leaders and foreign dignitaries walked up to Ali's casket as a military band played or a man sang prayers. Iran's Parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and President Masoud Pezeshkian, key leaders in the country's civilian government, all paid their respects.

Foreign leaders including Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Field Marshal Asim Munir.

Ali's body will be transported to cities in both Iran and neighbouring Iraq, which is a holy place for Iran's Shia population. Authorities plan to shut down streets, airspace and daily life in Tehran as mourners commemorate the leader's life.

In Tehran, images of the late Khamenei's fist could be seen in banners and in a giant statue in Tehran's Enghelab Square. *—PTI*

ICE arrests 10,000 people in 5 days in revitalised push

The sharp escalation comes as the DHS is moving to quiter nationwide enforcement after being greeted with backlash last year *—ANI*

WASHINGTON, 3 JULY

US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) arrested about 10,000 people over a five-day period at the end of June, averaging nearly 2,000 arrests a day, marking a sharp escalation in President Donald Trump's mass deportation campaign, according to figures obtained by The Associated Press.

The increase follows a shift away from high-profile raids in major cities to quieter nationwide enforcement operations aimed at meeting deportation targets. The Department of Homeland Security said its officers were targeting "criminal illegal aliens including murderers, rapists, pedophiles, gang members, and terrorists," adding: "If you come to our country illegally, we will find you, we will arrest you, and we will deport you."

The number of people held in ICE detention facilities also rose to about 39,000 in June, up from roughly 30,000 in previous months. According to data analysed by AP, December previously recorded the highest average under the Trump administration at 1,283 arrests per day. The administration reduced large-scale public crackdowns after deadly protests in Minneapolis but has continued expanding immigration enforcement nationwide under a lower-profile strategy. *—PTI*

If we don't, China will take over crypto: Trump

US President Donald Trump has dismissed concerns over a potential conflict of interest arising from his family's massive cryptocurrency holdings, saying the US must dominate both cryptocurrency and artificial intelligence to stay ahead of China.

"The way I view crypto's a little different; we have to be at the top, otherwise China's going to take it over," Trump told CNBC, adding that the US was "leading substantially in AI over China and everybody else."

Financial disclosures released on 30 June showed Trump earned nearly USD 550 million from the premier token sale of World Liberty Financial (WLF), a crypto platform backed by his family. A WLF affiliate also partnered with Pakistan to explore using its USD1 stablecoin for cross-border payments, coinciding with US interest in Balochistan.

Ukraine ordered the Nord Stream pipeline attack: German lawyers

BERLIN, 3 JULY

Kyiv is still reeling from the massive Russian barrage on Thursday *—UKRAINE EMERGENCY SERVICES*

Ukrainian authorities were behind the 2022 attacks on the Nord Stream gas pipeline that links Russia with Europe, German federal prosecutors alleged on Thursday.

The prosecutors said in a statement that then Ukrainian army official Serhii K and six others were an "accomplice to war crimes" by attacking civilian objects and acted "on the orders of state authorities in Ukraine.

The undersea explosions on 26 September, 2022 damaged the Nord Stream pipeline that were built to carry Russian natural gas to Germany under the Baltic Sea. They added to tensions over the war in Ukraine as European countries moved to wean themselves off Russian energy sources. Russia has accused the US of staging the explosions, a charge Washington has denied.

Prosecutors say the aim of the plot was to permanently disrupt gas deliveries via the pipelines and prevent Russia from using the revenues from natural gas trading to finance its military operations. *—Agencies*

'IF NATO MEANS ANYTHING, IT SHOULD FOCUS ON AIR DEFENCE'

KYIV, 3 JULY

After Russia's massive strikes killed at least 30 people in Kyiv, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Friday said that the upcoming NATO summit should focus on air defences.

"If of course, NATO still means anything to the Allies," he said in a video statement. At least 10 people were still missing from the Russian barrage.

Russia's massive strikes came as Ukraine has been striking deeper into the country, targeting fuel and military infrastructure that has raised alarm bells in Moscow and triggered an unprecedented fuel crisis in many parts, including occupied-Crimea.

"Russians strike ordinary civilian infrastructure, and terror is the only argument they have left for not stopping the war. Reliable protection of Ukraine's skies is needed as a prerequisite for diplomacy," Zelenskyy stated on X.

The NATO summit is set to be held on 7 and 8 July in the Turkish capital Ankara. *—Salar News*

No sick leave without certificate in Germany

BERLIN, 3 JULY

Workers in Germany can no longer take sick leave without a doctor's note, said Chancellor Friedrich Merz while announcing a sweeping package of 34 reforms aimed at revitalising growth and bolstering competitiveness on Thursday.

"We know this is a tough decision. But we can no longer afford this competitive disadvantage caused by prolonged absences from work," Merz said, claiming that "too many" people were phoning in sick.

Firms, meanwhile, will be given more flexibility on fixed-term contracts and dismissing high earners.

His coalition agreed to a "catalog of significant reforms" to boost competitiveness, cut corporate bureaucracy, and provide EUR10 billion ($11.4 billion) in annual income tax relief, partly funded by raising the top tax bracket from 45% to 47% for ultra-high earners.

Germany plans major welfare, housing, and pension reforms: the state pension will gradually add an investment-based element to its pay-as-you-go system, alongside a phased retirement-age increase. A new federal housing company will back affordable housing, and tighter data-sharing will target welfare fraud.

Industrially, the package prioritises autos, chemicals, pharma, batteries, semiconductors, AI, and clean tech, cutting red tape and allowing automatic approvals if officials miss a four-month deadline. *—ANI*

AMID NEW ETHNIC LAWS

Man with Tibetan flag dies after self-immolation outside UN HQ

NEW YORK, 3 JULY

A 42-year-old man holding a Tibetan flag in front of the United Nations headquarters in New York has died after setting himself on fire on Thursday in an apparent act of protest, according to officials.

The man's name has not been officially released because his family hasn't been notified yet, according to police. He was reportedly identified by a friend as Lobga Rangzen, who had reportedly been residing in the United States for around two decades.

According to a report by the New York Post, Rangzen became engulfed in flames as passing vehicles honked their horns in response to the scene before collapsing to the ground, where two first responders doused the flames with fire extinguishers roughly 15 seconds later.

Law enforcement authorities confirmed that Rangzen was subsequently rushed to Bellevue Hospital, where he was pronounced dead.

Officers at the scene were observed carrying documents, including a sheet of paper that displayed the slogan "China out of Tibey" – a phrase widely connected to the Tibetan Independence Movement.

China says Tibet has been part of its territory since the mid-13th century, and its Communist Party has governed the Himalayan region since 1951. But many Tibetans say they were effectively independent for most of their history and the Chinese government wants to exploit the resource-rich region while crushing its cultural identity. *—Agencies*

The man was protesting China's crackdown on Tibet *—SCREENGRAB*

Norovirus sickens over 120 on cruise ship near US

SAN FRANCISCO, 3 JULY

Around 120 people on a cruise that docked in San Francisco on Thursday were infected with a stomach virus, federal health officials said.

The Ruby Princess was on a 20-day round-trip journey from San Francisco to Canada and Alaska, setting sail on June 12, when 102 passengers and 23 crew members out of 3,032 passengers and 1,144 crew members were affected by norovirus, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said, adding that not all the infected people were sick at the same time or when the ship arrived or left port. Norovirus is highly contagious, often spread through contaminated food or surfaces. It is a short-lived illness, but can be dangerous for people with pre-existing conditions, young children and those aged 65 and above.

This year, there have been seven outbreaks on cruise ships. *— PTI*

Netflix launches NextGen India Writers' initiative

MUMBAI, 3 JULY

Netflix has announced the launch of the NextGen India Writers' Programme, a talent development initiative aimed at mentoring emerging Indian screenwriters. The programme, being introduced in India for the first time, is open to writers with up to three years of professional experience. Selected participants will participate in a two-month hybrid programme comprising mentorship, workshops, and guidance from industry experts to develop original series ideas into structured series bibles. Monika Shergill, Netflix India's VP of content, stated, "Every great story begins with a writer. In a country as creatively rich and diverse as India, we know there are countless people with extraordinary stories to tell who simply haven't had the opportunity yet." Applications are open from 1 July to 1 September. —*PTI*

HCLTech signs $1.14B digital deal with European firm

NEW DELHI, 3 JULY

HCLTech announced it has secured a USD 1.14 billion deal from a Fortune Global 50 European company to transform and manage its digital workplace and enterprise networks. The company did not disclose the client's name. The partnership involves establishing an AI-driven operating model, with an initial five-and-a-half-year term from July 2026 to December 2031, with options to extend for five years. HCLTech said, "The estimated value of the agreement during the initial term is USD 1.14 billion. This is entirely a net new business for the company." The deal signifies a major step in HCLTech's growth in digital services. —*PTI*

Andhra CM launches Kadapa JSW Steel Plant construction

KADAPA, 3 JULY

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu launched the construction of the JSW Rayalaseema Integrated Steel Plant in Sunnapurallapalli and Peddadanluru villages. The Rs 16,350 crore project will be developed by JSW Andhra Pradesh Steel Limited in two phases over 1,100 acres. Phase I involves Rs 4,500 crore, with Phase II adding Rs 11,850 crore, aiming for a capacity of 2 million tonnes per annum (MTPA), with commercial production targeted for March 2028. The plant will be a modern Green Steel facility, utilising scrap-based Electric Arc Furnace (EAF) technology powered by renewable energy. The project, which was approved in 2019 and revived in 2024, is expected to generate numerous jobs and promote ancillary industries across Rayalaseema —*PTI*

WhatsApp usernames are a cybercrime risk: Govt

IT Secy justifies notices issued to Meta, Telegram and Signal

NEW DELHI, 3 JULY

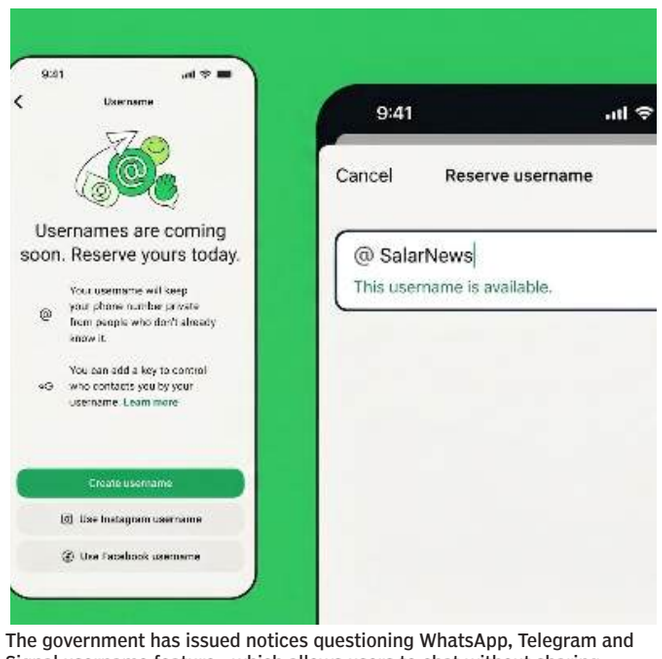
The government is demanding answers from WhatsApp and other major messaging platforms over the rollout of their username features. Officials cite a "serious" risk of impersonation and cybercrime IT Secretary S Krishnan said on Friday.

The comment assumes significance as the government has issued notices this week questioning WhatsApp, Telegram and Signal username feature—which allows users to chat without sharing phone numbers.

Speaking on the sidelines of a CII Conference, Krishnan highlighted the government's concerns over username-based features on encrypted platforms.

"The kind of encouragement or facility it provides for committing more cybercrimes... is a very serious issue. We have directed WhatsApp to explain why they have this feature and have similarly sought explanations from others," he said.

Officials are currently examining whether these functionalities make it easier for cybercriminals to conceal identities, impersonate users, or evade detection during online fraud.



The government has issued notices questioning WhatsApp, Telegram and Signal username feature—which allows users to chat without sharing phone numbers –*AI*

Within days of announcing plans to introduce the username feature, Meta-owned WhatsApp was served notice by the government asking why action should not be initiated under the IT Act and related rules; the Centre also sought detailed information and directed WhatsApp to pause the feature until all consultations are completed "to the satisfaction of the government".

The Supreme Court in a case relating to digital arrest has taken up the matter, he said adding that the username feature "is another dimension of the way cybercrimes can be committed".

- WhatsApp was served notice by the government asking why action should not be initiated under the IT Act. Officials are examining whether this username feature make it easier for cybercriminals to conceal identities, impersonate users, or evade detection during online fraud.

Reports have claimed that sensitive internal information linked to the company was leaked online by threat actors. The government is examining the reported incident to ascertain its nature, extent and possible cybersecurity implications. In tandem, the government is probing a reported Tata Electronics data leak.

Responding to reports that WhatsApp had sought additional time to respond to the government's queries, Krishnan said, "Not that I am aware of." —*Agencies*

UNRELEASED IPHONE 18

Apple-linked Tata data leak is being probed: IT Secy

NEW DELHI, 3 JULY

The government is investigating an alleged data breach at Tata Electronics, a major supplier in Apple's global manufacturing supply chain that produces iPhone components in India, said S Krishnan, Secretary, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).

The breach reportedly exposed sensitive information related to Apple's unreleased iPhone model and has been reported to the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In), he said.

The incident follows reports that a ransomware group allegedly stole data from Tata Electronics and put it on the dark web, including details of components and suppliers along with photos of Apple's unreleased iPhone 18 Pro model.

"This is also a kind of cybercrime. We are investigating it....It has been reported to us," Krishnan said.

On whether the government was considering a legal framework for Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) to prevent users from accessing banned applications, Krishnan said the issue required both legal and technological interventions rather than relying solely on legislation.

Krishnan said existing guidelines already require VPN service providers to register if they operate in India. However, he noted that some providers choose not to register and instead offer services from outside the country, making enforcement more challenging.

The MeitY Secretary said the government was examining the issue from both legal and technological perspectives to ensure that restrictions on applications are implemented effectively while addressing challenges posed by services operating outside India's jurisdiction. —*Agencies*

AMONGST 44 COMMISSIONER

UN AI Commission names Ambani, Mittal as founding members

NEW DELHI, 3 JULY

Reliance Industries CMD Mukesh Ambani and Bharti Enterprises Chairman Sunil Bharti Mittal have been named founding members and commissioners of the new AI for Good Global Commission.

The initiative is backed by the UN's telecommunications body, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), which features 44 commissioners.

The Commission is co-chaired by Rwanda's President Paul Kagame and Salesforce CEO Marc Benioff, with ITU Secretary-General Doreen Bogdan-Martin serving as vice-chair.

The official statement from the AI for Good Global Commission lists Ambani among the body's founding members and commissioners, adding that, "the Commission brings together more than 40 founding members — including heads of government, industry, and UN agencies — to help define practical pathways to strengthen trust, expand access and unlock AI's potential to solve real-world challenges at the speed the technology demands."

The commission will focus on AI Trust by promoting public trust through responsible AI and AI Access by building AI infrastructure, capacity, and readiness, and AI Impact by accelerating the use of AI to address global challenges.

The new AI Commission builds on the foundation of the multi-stakeholder ITU and UNESCO Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development, which has shaped global priorities for connectivity, digital inclusion and economic development.

The AI for Good Global Commission will hold its inaugural meeting at ITU's AI for Good Global Summit in Geneva from 7-10 July.

The Summit is part of the Digital Week, a series of digital cooperation events taking place in Geneva in July, including the first UN-mandated Global Dialogue on AI Governance and the WSIS Forum. —*PTI*

Services sector growth hits 17-month low: PMI

NEW DELHI, 3 JULY

India's services sector growth dipped to a 17-month low in June as challenging market conditions and reduced client interest for some services reportedly stymied sales and output, a monthly survey said on Friday.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Services PMI Business Activity Index fell to 57.4 in June from 59.8 in May, registering the weakest upturn in 17 months. The index, based on a single question asking how the level of business activity compares with the situation a month earlier, remained comfortably above both the neutral mark of 50.0 and its long-run average.

"India's services PMI remained in expansionary territory but eased to 57.4 in June, the lowest reading in 17 months. The loss of momentum points to more challenging market conditions and weaker demand, particularly at home," Pranjul Bhandari, Chief India Economist at HSBC, said.

Several firms indicated that challenging market conditions and reduced client interest in their services dampened sales at their units, resulting in stagnant hiring activity and lower business confidence.

However, one area of strength in June was exports, with firms reporting the strongest rise in three months. Demand from clients in Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, Malaysia, Nepal, Oman, Qatar, Singapore, the UAE and the US improved, according to the survey.—*PTI*

Will not privatise Haffkine Pharma: M'rashtra govt

MUMBAI, 3 JULY

The Maharashtra government has no plans to privatise Haffkine Bio-Pharmaceutical Corp Ltd, stating that an earlier proposal to invite private parries was not pursued.

Food & Drug Minister Narhari Zirwal said, "The government's objective was never to hand over the vaccine maker to a private player."

He explained the proposal aimed at modernising Haffkine's facilities via a partnership model for manufacturing vaccines and biological products.

The state sought Centre support for facility modernisation, but the limited response led to abandoning the proposal.

Opposition members called for a probe into irregularities, and suggested appointing a senior officer to oversee Haffkine. They raised concerns over halted production, manpower shortages, land sales, and procurement practices.

Zirwal emphasised that Haffkine would not be privatised. —*PTI*

Mkt on third day winning streak; BSE up 262 pts, NSE by 95 pts

Driven by a rally in IT stocks and positive outcomes from the India-Japan Summit and falling crude oil prices –*AI*

MUMBAI, 3 JULY

Sensex and Nifty ended higher on Friday, extending their winning streak to a third day despite bouts of volatility and profit-booking, driven by a rally in IT stocks, positive outcomes from the India-Japan Summit and falling crude oil prices.

BSE Sensex climbed 261.79 points (+0.34 per cent) to settle at 77,763.91. Recording an intraday jump of 655.4 points (+0.84 per cent) to 78,157.52. The NSE Nifty went up 95.15 points (+0.39 per cent) to end at 24,270.85.

From the Sensex pack, HCL Tech surged 5.79 per cent, followed by Tech Mahindra, Bharti Airtel, Sun Pharma. Conversely, Axis Bank and State Bank of India were among the laggards. Sectorally, realty surged 2.22 per cent, focused IT jumped 1.74 per cent and IT gained 1.55 per cent.

Meanwhile, power, capital goods, industrials, utilities, auto and consumer durables declined.

Brent crude went up 0.24 per cent to USD 71.97 per barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors offloaded equities worth Rs 311.82 crore on Thursday.

On Wednesday, the Sensex jumped 579.48 points (+0.75 per cent) to end at 77,502.12. The Nifty rallied 169.85 points (+0.71 per cent) to settle at 24,175.70. —*PTI*

FM invites French firms to join Viksit Bharat 2047

NEW DELHI, 3 JULY

Finance Minister **Nirmala Sitharaman** invited French businesses and investors to join India's journey towards Viksit Bharat 2047, emphasising the importance of strengthening the India-France Strategic Partnership.

Speaking at an India-France Business Roundtable in Paris, she urged French investors to explore partnerships in healthcare, pharmaceuticals, and biotechnology.

Aimed at leveraging the two countries' complementary strengths in life sciences, vaccines, APIs, clinical research, precision medicine, and digital health for healthcare value chains.

She highlighted India's clean energy goals, including 500 GW non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030, Green Hydrogen Mission, and Production Linked Incentive schemes.

The minister noted that these offer significant investment opportunities in renewable energy, green hydrogen, battery storage, offshore wind, and smart grids.

Sitharaman also promoted India's financial ecosystem, naming IFSCA's role as a global hub for banking, fund management, leasing, and sustainable finance.

She stressed the expanding bilateral trade and cooperation in AI and digital infrastructure, adding India's digital economy accounts for nearly half of worldwide real-time digital payments. —*PTI*

DEDICATED FRAMEWORK

Time for separate AI legislation, says IT Secy S Krishnan

NEW DELHI, 3 JUNE

- The government has so far addressed AI concerns, including deepfakes, through existing legal provisions instead of introducing a standalone law.

The Centre may begin drafting a dedicated legal framework to regulate artificial intelligence as the technology continues to evolve. Speaking on Friday, MeitY Secretary **S Krishnan** indicated that the government believes the time is right to consider standalone AI legislation.

"My minister and I, have been on record that we will look at AI regulation when the time is right, and it appears that the time is getting right and we will start looking at it," Krishnan said, responding to a question on AI regulations at the CII conference.

Krishnan said the government has so far addressed AI concerns, including deepfakes through existing legal provisions instead of introducing a standalone law.

Krishnan said discussions on a dedicated legal framework had commenced after the government had so far relied on existing legal provisions to address emerging challenges.

Asked when draft AI legislation could be expected, "At the official level, what we can do is prepare draft legislation. When it finally comes out is not something which I can comment on," he said.

On access to advanced AI models, Krishnan said export restrictions on Anthropic's Mythos had been eased. He, however, clarified that restrictions may continue on Anthropic's next-gen models.

He added that extending access to entities in the 15 countries, including India, would require approval from the US government. —*ANI*

Adani Enterprises expands QIP to Rs 15,000 crore

NEW DELHI, 3 JULY

Gautam Adani-led group's flagship firm has increased the size of its Qualified Institutional Placement (QIP) to Rs 15,000 crore from the planned Rs 10,000 crore after the share sale attracted bids worth about Rs 38,000 crore, or 3.8 times the original issue size, said sources familiar with the transaction.

Adani Enterprises Ltd's offering, launched on Thursday, was subscribed about 3.8 times the original base issue size, with demand led primarily by long-only institutional investors, they said. It drew strong interest from long-only institutional investors, with participation from global asset managers including Capital Group, Goldman Sachs, BlackRock, Blackstone and Nomura.

Domestic investors included HDFC Mutual Fund, ICICI Prudential Mutual Fund, Kotak Mutual Fund, Aditya Birla Sun Life Mutual Fund, SBI Mutual Fund and Tata Mutual Fund.

The book was fully covered within 48 hours of the roadshow, ahead of the formal launch, prompting the company to exercise an upsize option, the people said. Several investors sought allocations larger than they ultimately received, reflecting strong institutional demand.

The fundraising comes as investors assess ongoing legal proceedings in the US involving Adani Group Chairman **Gautam Adani**. —*PTI*

David vs Goliath: Messi's Arg meets Cape Verde in Round of 32

MIAMI GARDENS, 3 JULY

Argentina has the World Cup titles, arguably the best player of all-time in Lionel Messi, the rich history and a roster filled with stars. Cape Verde has none of that.

Soccer's version of David vs. Goliath happens on Friday night at Hard Rock Stadium, where defending World Cup champion Argentina faces a Cape Verde squad with absolutely no burden of expectations going into the Round of 32 match.

"I believe we can do a great thing here," Cape Verde backup defender Ianique dos Santos Tavares, who goes by the name Stopira, said through a translator on Thursday. "And this is no exception. This match is no exception."

A win by Cape Verde would be one of the most stunning upsets in soccer history, maybe even sports history.

Think of it on a "Miracle on Ice" scale from 1980, when the youthful US hockey team stunned the supposedly unbeatable Soviet Union at the Lake Placid Olympics and went on to win the gold medal.

This would be a Miracle on Grass, without question.

The Argentines mean no disrespect when they say this, but when the draw for the tournament came out they thought Spain or Uruguay would be waiting for them in this round.

It was going to be the Group J winner — three-time champion Argentina — against the Group H runner-up, and most people would have picked Spain or Uruguay for that spot.

Enter Cape Verde, the tiny island nation with a 40-year-old goalkeeper, the tale of how his mother needed help to get to the US to watch some of the group stage, and how one of the longest long shots in the tournament grabbed everyone's attention by playing Spain to a draw in its opening match.

"The most important match in our history," Cape Verde coach Bubista said. "So, we are being responsible and also trying to enjoy the match. We did not reach this stage by chance. It was on our own merits and we want to show the world our qualities, our values and that there's a lot of quality in Cape Verdean football."

Cape Verde hasn't yet won a match at this year's World Cup, making it the only team to reach the Round of 32 without a victory. It had three draws in the group stage; Argentina won all three of its matches, with Messi starring in each of them.

They're even now. It's win or go home. And it's no fluke that Cape Verde is here, Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni said. "We are not surprised, to be honest," Scaloni said. "They are a good team. And they are not here by chance. We must respect them. And that's what we will do." *—PTI*

Ramos & Ronaldo score as Portugal beats Croatia 2-1

Croatia almost draws, referee rules No Goal

TORONTO, 3 JULY

At 41, Cristiano Ronaldo will get another match in a Portugal uniform, thanks to a penalty he scored, a stoppage time header by Goncalo Ramos, and a VAR ruling the Croatia team still doesn't understand.

Ramos headed in the winner as Portugal beat Croatia 2-1 in a wild finish that also included a Croatian goal disallowed for offside just before the final whistle in a World Cup Round of 32 match on Thursday night.

The game featured a matchup of 40-somethings — Ronaldo, in his sixth World Cup, and Croatia's Luka Modri , making his fifth bid for a tournament title.

Ronaldo tied things up in the 68th minute on a penalty kick that gave the megastar his first knockout stage goal at the World Cup before being subbed out in the 81st minute.

"I never felt any of that (fear)," he said. "Yes, nervous. But as always, you have to be very positive for things to go well."

Still, it was Ramos who gave Portugal the victory and a berth in the Round of 16. "I love that type of moment, I love that type of games," he said. "I want to play every game like that."

Portugal moves on to face Spain on Monday.

Things got weird after Ramos scored. With Portugal and its fans still enthralled with his goal, Croatia thought it had tied things up 2-2 in the very last moments. But after a 2 1/2-minute delay, Mario Pasalic was called offside as VAR ruled no goal. Croatia fans threw bottles on the field and whistled in protest.

Croatia midfielder Petar Sucic said, "the referee said he didn't see (anyone) touch the ball, he said that he had a sensor in that ball," that caused the offside ruling. "For me, it's a regular goal."

Portugal coach Roberto Martinez said it was, indeed, the chip in the ball that triggered the decision. "I need to tell them (Croatia fans) the message is very clear: The balls now have a chip, and it's very clear that's why the VAR intervened," he said. "It's not a subjective opinion." *—PTI*

Germany coach Nagelsmann quits post defeat

BERLIN, 3 JULY

Julian Nagelsmann has resigned as Germany coach after his team failed to make the World Cup Round of 16 for the third tournament running, and former Liverpool manager Jürgen Klopp is in line to take over.

Nagelsmann's departure, announced on Friday by the national soccer federation, comes four days after Paraguay stunned Germany on penalties in the Round of 32.

The federation said it planned to speak to Klopp and "he has already signaled his willingness in general to take on the role." It would be Klopp's first coaching job since leaving Liverpool in 2024.

Nagelsmann initially said he'd stay on with Germany on a contract which had another two years to run and reportedly made him among the highest-paid coaches at the World Cup. He faced mounting criticism over his tactics and team selection at the tournament.

Germany's defeat in the Round of 32 followed group-stage losses at the 2018 World Cup in Russia and the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, when it was a 32-team tournament. It has not won a men's World Cup knockout game since beating Argentina in the 2014 final. *—PTI*

Embolo, Ndoye score as Switzerland defeats Algeria 2-0

VANCOUVER, 3 JULY

Breel Embolo and Dan Ndoye both scored as Switzerland advanced to the Round of 16 at the World Cup with a 2-0 victory over Algeria here. Switzerland will play the winner of Friday's match between Colombia and Ghana in Kansas City, Missouri. The Round of 16 game is set for next Tuesday in Vancouver.

Switzerland has not won a knockout-round match since 1938 in France, but in 1954 the team won a playoff game to reach the quarterfinals.

Although the Swiss reached the Round of 16 at the past three World Cups, there was a smaller field of 32 teams in each of those tournaments, and they could get no further.

Algeria was eliminated after returning to the World Cup for the first time since 2014, when it advanced to the knockout round but fell to eventual champion Germany.

Algeria dominated the first 10 minutes on Thursday night before Johan Manzambi raced down the right side and crossed to Embolo for the tap-in. Embolo celebrated his 26th international goal with a knee slide. Less than a minute into the second half, Ndoye scored with a blast from the top of the box that diving Algeria goalkeeper Luca Zidane couldn't stop.

Fabian Rieder nearly got a third goal for Switzerland in the 81st minute but missed on the tap-in as the ball skirted across the face of Algeria's goal.

Algeria advanced as a third-place finisher after a 3-3 draw against Austria last Saturday in Kansas City. The result sent both teams through to the knockout round but eliminated Iran. Algeria captain Riyad Mahrez, 35, scored a pair of goals.

FIFA President Gianni Infantino was at the game, his second of the day. Earlier heattended the match between Spain and Austria in Inglewood, California. *—PTI*

Mahrez retires from Algeria team

Riyad Mahrez, a five-time Premier League winner, announced his retirement from international soccer following Algeria's World Cup exit, a 2-0 defeat to Switzerland in the Round of 32 on Thursday. "There were good times and difficult times as well, of course. That's part of a career," he said afterward. "But representing Algeria has been a dream of mine ever since I was young, to play for my country. It's been an immense honour and a great source of pride." He added: "It is the new generation's turn to play." *—PTI*

Global Chess League eyes meet in Bengaluru

BENGALURU, 3 JULY

A delegation from the Global Chess League met Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister G Parameshwara, who also holds the sports portfolio, on Friday to discuss hosting its fourth edition in Bengaluru. The delegation expressed interest in bringing the Global Chess League, one of the world's premier chess leagues, to Bengaluru and sought support from the Department of Youth Empowerment and Sports, the deputy CM's office said in a statement. Parameshwara said hosting international sporting events would significantly boost Karnataka's sports ecosystem and reaffirmed the government's commitment to supporting prestigious global events, it said. Global Chess League CEO Gourav Rakshit, international chess player Prachura P P, and other members of the delegation were present at the meeting. *—PTI*

Gukesh rises to joint second spot in Grand Chess Tour in Croatia

ZAGREB, 3 JULY

World champion D Gukesh made good use of his white pieces to beat Dutch Grandmaster Anish Giri in the final game of the day to rise to joint second spot after the second day of the Zagreb leg of the Grand Chess Tour here.

Iranian Grandmaster Firoujza Alireza is at the top by extending his lead by a huge three points.

With 10 points in his kitty out of a possible 12, Alireza is far ahead of his rivals -- Vincent Keymer of Germany, Maxime Vachier-Lagrave of France, Deac Bogdan-Daniel of Romania and Gukesh, who all have identical seven points.

Another half point behind are India's R Praggnanandhaa, Giri and Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan while Croatioan Ivan Saric and Dutchman Jorden van Foreest are at the bottom of the table with just two points apiece.

Gukesh made most of his opportunities against Giri in a Ruy Lopez exchange variation. For once, the Dutch Grandmaster of Nepalese origin was seen lost from his prep book as Gukesh launched an attack against his king and never looked back.

Winning an exchange, the youngest ever world champion did nothing wrong in wrapping up a fine victory.

Meanwhile, the day could have been better for Praggnanandhaa but Alireza simply had the Caissa on his side.

After reaching a probable draw out of a game that had fluctuating fortunes, Praggnanandhaa was the last one to make a blunder and lost from what was a theoretically drawn endgame. *—PTI*

Promising signs for India as men's foil team earns Asiad spot

NEW DELHI, 3 JULY

India ended without a medal at the recently-concluded Asian Senior Fencing Championships, but the hosts still had a significant takeaway, with the men's foil team securing direct qualification for the upcoming Asian Games -- an achievement that could strengthen the country's prospects in the sport going forward.

The 24-member Indian contingent, competing at the continental event hosted in the country for the first time, showed steady progress against Asia's fencing powerhouses.

Several fencers pushed top teams like Japan and South Korea close, narrowly missing podium finishes by just a point or two, underlining the growing competitiveness of Indian fencing at the international level.

Rajeev Mehta, the secretary-general of the Fencing Association of India (FAI) and the Fencing Confederation of Asia (FCA), said the home team gained valuable experience from the event.

"Hosting the Senior Asian Fencing Championships for the first time is a watershed moment that will permanently redefine the trajectory of Indian sports. Our fencers have given a very good performance on home soil, proving they can match strides with the world's absolute elite.

The men's foil team, ranked eighth in Asia, stood out as India's best performers at the tournament. The quartet of Sachin, Sanasam Hemash Singh, Tejas Manoj Patil and Aditya produced a strong tactical display in the relay bouts to finish in the top eight, securing India's direct qualification for the Asian Games.

In the individual events, Kanupriya Chawla delivered India's best result of the championship in the women's foil category. *—PTI*

The quartet of Sachin, Sanasam Hemash Singh, Tejas Manoj Patil and Aditya produced a strong tactical display

- The 24-member Indian contingent, competing at the event in the country for the first time, showed steady progress against Asia's fencing powerhouses.